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CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE IN THE MIXTECA ALTA, MEXICO (1500 - 1600)

by

WILLIAM GEORGE LOVELL

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1975

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Culture and Landscape in the Mixteca Alta, Mexico (1500 - 1600), submitted by William George Lovell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Lying in the north and west of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, the Mixteca Alta, the "high land of the cloud people", is a rugged upland area with elevations ranging from 5,000 to 9,000 feet. The region in the present day is one of the poorest territories of the entire Mexican Federation, and is characterised by acute shortages of land, sizeable out-migration, and chronically low standards of living. Each year the communities of the Mixteca Alta raise barely enough food to attain self-sufficiency, with natural hazards such as droughts, summer frosts and hailstorms, and high rainfall variability, in conjunction with a scarcity of cultivable land, making subsistence for many campesinos an eternally precarious and imponderable concern. Life everywhere is difficult, and each year many families choose to abandon their traditional rural ways for a new urban life style, leaving the dry, dusty, and desolate fields of the Mixteca Alta for the shacks and shanties of Mexico City.

The Mixteca Alta, however, was not always such an impoverished and unattractive region. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Mixteca Alta was one of the most fruitful and well-ordered realms of Mesoamerica, supporting a great number of populous and prosperous communities. Even during the first fifty years of Spanish colonial rule, after the military Conquest of 1520-1525, the region was reasonably economically productive and, in fact, was one of the most highly valued areas of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from the point of view of silk raising and cochineal production. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, this prosperity had eclipsed, and since

this time the communities of the Mixteca Alta have languished in a condition of social and economic ill-being.

The fundamental problems underlying the plight of the region today are the lack of cultivable land and the inability of the land under cultivation to support a population which has been increasing rapidly and uninterruptedly since the Mexican Revolution of 1910 - 1921. This is because much formerly cultivable land has been permanently removed from agricultural utilisation as a result of disasterous sequences of soil erosion. Processes of natural and even human-induced soil erosion were operative in the Mixteca Alta before the Spanish Conquest, but certain events occurred during the first eighty years of Spanish colonial rule which, in unison, precipitated a drastic acceleration of the processes of soil erosion. These events included the decline of the aboriginal population through contact with Old World diseases, leading to the abandonment of terraced land on hill slopes, and the introduction by the Spaniards of Old World breeds of livestock, particularly sheep and goats, into the agricultural economy. Present day land hunger, social distress, and economic deprivation, therefore, have to be viewed in an historical perspective and, to a considerable degree, must be seen as consequences of the nature of the impact which Spanish colonial rule had on the land and the people of the Mixteca Alta.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In undertaking the research and writing of this thesis I have incurred many debts, some of which I would like to formally acknowledge. To my Mexican friends Carmen and Cholin I owe much more than I am able to convey in a few sentences, for it was their warmth, generosity, hospitality, and guidance that made my initiation into life in Mexico a pleasurable and learning experience; for steering me into their care and attention, my friend Bjarne Tokerud receives my grateful thanks.

My brief stay in Yanhuitlán was also made memorable by the cordiality and humility of the townspeople, particularly Gerardo Vivero Reyes, one of the local schoolmasters. In my various wanderings throughout the Mixteca I was met and received with courtesy and interest by man, woman, and child, and although sometimes people did not have much to give, whatever did come my way I consider sufficient and worthy.

Research and experience in the field was made possible by my receiving a summer bursary from the Department of Geography at the University of Alberta; my appreciation is extended to the Department for this award, and also for their financial support over the past one and a half years. I would also like to thank my teachers Jack Bergmann, Ruth Gruhn, and Dave Johnson for their assistance and criticism during the composition of the thesis.

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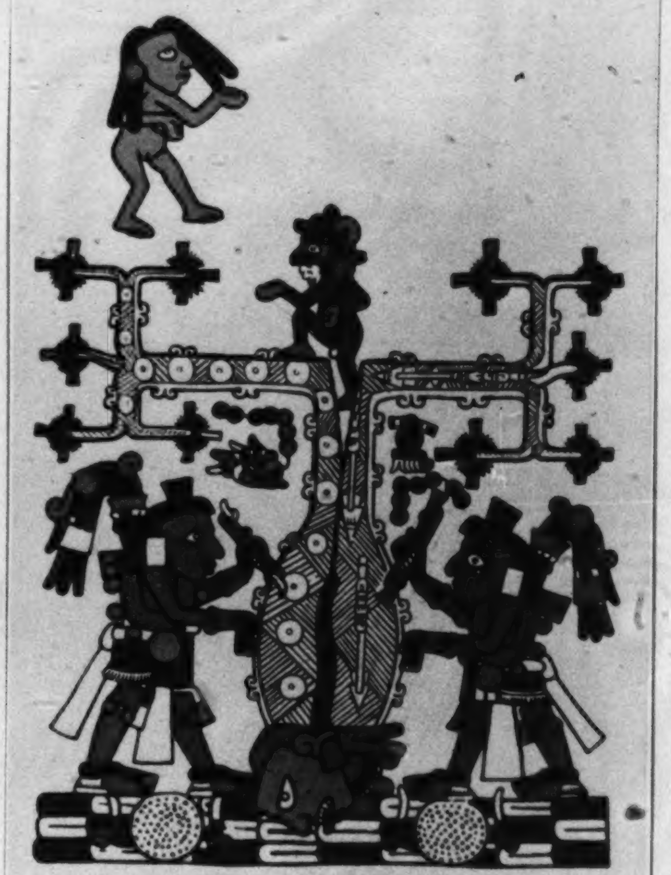
A god who had the name One-Deer
and the surname Snake of the Lion,
and a goddess, very gentle and beautiful,
whose name was also One-Deer,
and whose surname was Snake of the Tiger,
had two male children, very handsome,
prudent and wise in all the arts.
The two brothers, for their pleasure,
planted a garden;
they put there many kinds of trees,
flowers and roses,
and trees with fruit
and many herbs.
Men were restored to life
and in this way
began the Mixtec kingdom......

(Lines from an ancient Mixtec legend.)



THE BIRTH OF THE MIXTEC PEOPLE

The Birth of the Mixtec People

(from Codex Vindobonensis)

INTRODUCTION

The Mixtec Indians of Mexico, numbering around 275,000 in the present day,[1] occupy the north and western parts of Oaxaca state, with some slight overspill into the neighbouring states of Guerrero and Puebla (Figure 1). Together with a Mestizo population of approximately 300,000,[2] the Mixtec people inhabit one of Mexico's more intractable and unwieldy habitats, where man has always been hard pressed to eke out an existence. The Mixtec domain is rugged, mountainous, and broken throughout, containing much land which is totally useless from an agricultural perspective and much which can at best be described as marginal. Like most parts of the central Mexican plateau, the Mixteca has experienced a long sequence of soil erosion which has transformed previously productive and manageable areas into gullied badlands; with the removal of the fertile organic topsoil, the alkali-impregnated hardpan *tepetate*, a Mexican anathema, outcrops at the surface.[3] (Plate 1). Every summer, the annual rains turn the otherwise waterless or sluggish streams of the Mixteca into raging torrents

---

[1] R. S. Ravicz and A. K. Romney, "The Mixtec," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Vol. 7, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 371.

[2] This is a rough estimate based on demographic data presented in M. T. de la Peña, "Problemas Sociales y Económicos de las Mixtecas," *Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Mexico: 1950), pp. 119-126.

[3] B. J. Williams, "Tepetate in the Valley of Mexico," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 62, No. 4, (1972), pp. 618-626. Although Williams' study is primarily concerned with the origins and proliferation of *tepetate* in the Valley of Mexico, many of her observations are relevant to other parts of the central Mexican plateau where *tepetate*, in one or more of its forms, occurs as a surface outcrop.

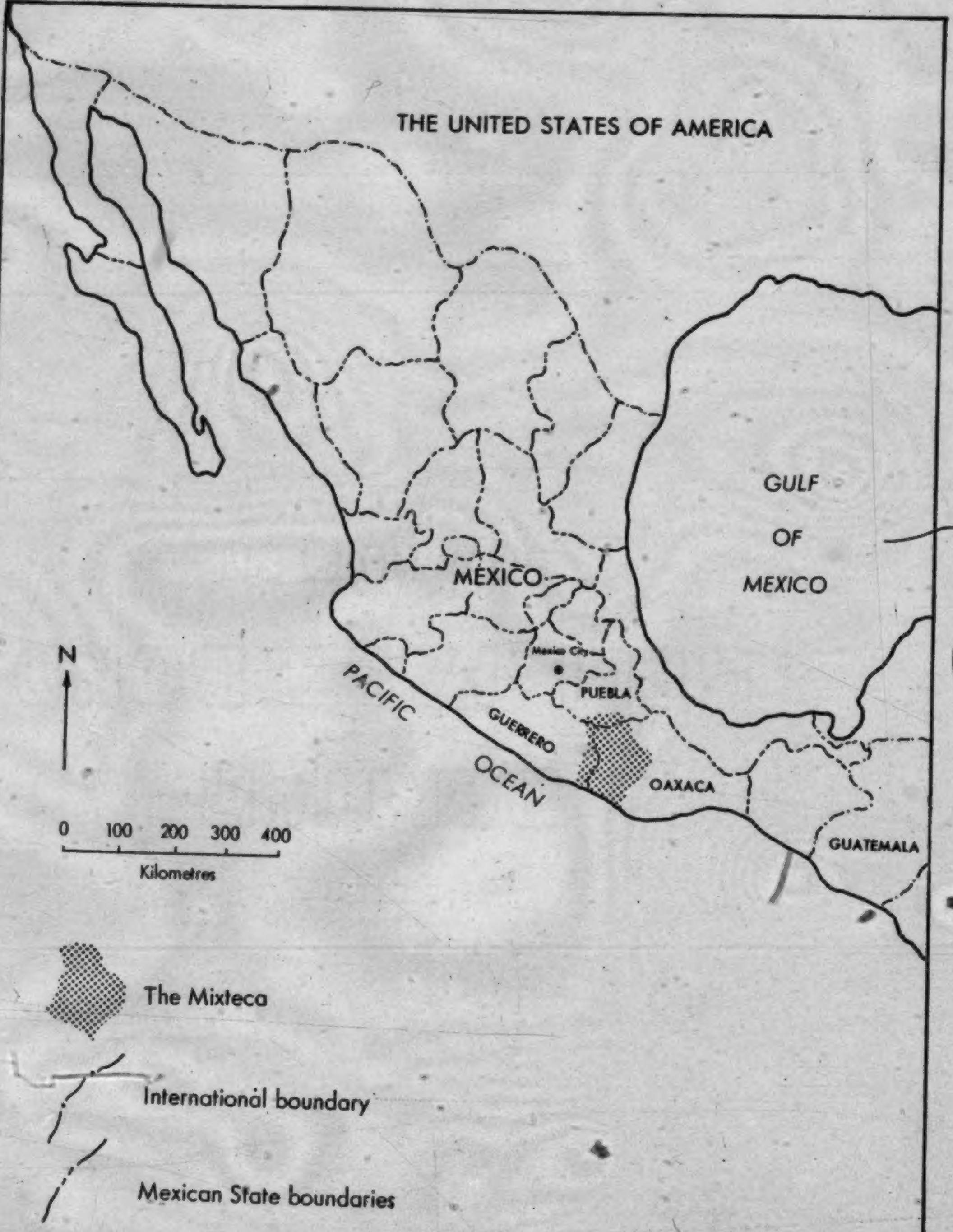


Figure 1- The Location of the Mixteca in the Mexican Federation

Source - M. A. Smith, *Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico, Mixtec Place Signs and Maps*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973

Plate 1 Gully erosion and outcrops of *tepetate* near Yanhuitlán.

which carve deep, narrow barrancas in the landscape and carry the process of soil denudation a step further.[4] Against such hostile natural forces, the struggle to survive is eternal.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Mixtec people have occupied northwest Oaxaca for at least two thousand years.[5] The pre-Conquest achievement of the Mixtec ranks them among the "high" cultures of Mesoamerica, a group whose skillful and elegant craftsmanship was unequalled by any other Mesoamerican people with respect to codical art, ceremonial ceramic ware, and the working of gold and other valued materials.[6] At the time of the Spanish Conquest of their territory, the Mixtec people were under the tributary jurisdiction of the Triple Alliance, the Tepaneca, the Acolhuaque and the Mexica having gained control over much of the Mixteca following bitter warfare lasting from 1455 until 1458.[7] The Spanish Conquest of the region was fully completed by around 1525, and was executed with a minimum of armed force, the Mixtec hatred of their Mexica overlords serving to assist the Spanish military entrada.[8] Initial Mixtec-Hispanic interaction was not as tragic as elsewhere in the New World, but nonetheless the philosophy and values of the Spanish colonial regime did fundamentally alter indigenous systems of production and distribution and brought about a shattering reorganisation of life. In the four and a half centuries since Spanish colonial rule was imposed, the Mixtec people have participated in the Mexican drive towards Independence (1821) and later Revolution (1910-21), and despite the reforms set in motion by the latter social movement, the Mixteca has emerged in the present day as one of the most backward, impoverished, and socially-retarded regions in the Mexican Federation.[9]

---

[4] S. F. Cook, Soil Erosion and Population in Central Mexico, Ibero-Americana: 34, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), p. 86.

[5] J. Paddock, ed., Ancient Oaxaca - Discoveries in Mexican Archaeology and History, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 175.

[6] M. Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1957), p. 300.

[7] P. Gerhard, A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 163, 200, and 285.

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[8] The name Mexica or Culhua Mexica will be used consistently in this thesis to describe the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán in the Valley of Mexico, who, by 1519, had come to exercise political and military hegemony over much of central and southern Mexico. The Mexica were the descendents of a group of nomadic Chichimecs who entered the Valley of Mexico from the north at the end of the thirteenth century. These nomads settled on a muddy promontory jutting into Lake Texcoco and became known as Azteca, after their mythical home, Aztlán. Later they adopted the name Tenochca, after their tribal leader Tenoch, whose memory was revered in the city named after him, Tenochtitlán. Finally, upon accepting the primacy of the Toltec lineage from Colhuacan, they became known as the Culhua Mexica. Around 1430, the Mexica formed a treaty with two other tribes resident in the Valley of Mexico, the Tepaneca and the Acolhuaque. This treaty became known as the Triple Alliance, and was formed in order to consolidate forces which would enable the participants of the Alliance to establish a tributary empire. The forces of the Triple Alliance succeeded in establishing this Empire, but by 1519 the Mexica had greatly overshadowed their allies in power and influence and were in effective control. Thus the Empire on the eve of the Spanish Conquest was not the Empire of the Triple Alliance but specifically the Empire of the Culhua Mexica of Tenochtitlán. See E. Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 130-152 for an interesting discussion of the culture history of the Mexica.

The objectives of this thesis are twofold. Firstly, the thesis is concerned with examining the nature of the cultural landscape of part of the Mixteca, the Mixteca Alta, during the sixteenth century, when the Indian and his land were exposed to the acculturating forces of imperial Spain; emphasis in this perspective is placed on the evolution of the cultural landscape and the modification of aboriginal patterns of life under Spanish colonial rule. Secondly, the thesis is concerned with demonstrating that the present social and economic characteristics of the region did not always prevail and that, on the contrary, the Mixteca Alta was one of the most well-ordered and economically fruitful realms of Mesoamerica during late pre-Hispanic times and also, after the Spanish Conquest, of sixteenth century New Spain; in this sense the thesis may be considered a problem-oriented historical geography which seeks to explain present circumstances by studying the events of the past. Chapter I outlines the physical and human geography of the Mixteca Alta in the present day, while the body of the thesis, Chapters II and III, examines the sixteenth century, in order to reconstruct the cultural landscape of the region for the late pre-Hispanic period and the early colonial period. The epilogue, Chapter IV, draws the past and the present together and concludes the thesis by offering historical explanations in an attempt to understand the fundamental problems confronting the communities of the Mixteca Alta to-day.

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[9] The monograph of M. T. de la Peña, op. cit., contains detailed information on many standard social parameters, most of which indicate that situations of hardship and deprivation are widespread in the Mixteca. For example, illiteracy in the Mixteca in 1940 was 78.6%, compared with a national figure of 51.6%; in some communities illiteracy ran as high as 99%, and for the Mixteca as a whole an estimated two-thirds of the population above school age had received no formal education. Similarly, infant mortality rates in 1940, ranging from 160 to 190 deaths for each 1000 births in the communities of Coixtlahuaca, Nochixtlán, and Teposcolula in the Mixteca Alta, were significantly higher than the Mexican average of 122. Other social statistics concerning death rates, domestic habitation, nutrition, and income further reflect a desperate, depressing and gloomy reality. Although de la Peña's data is now a little out-dated, more recent literature does not suggest that any substantial improvements have taken place in the Mixteca during the last twenty years.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GEO-CULTURAL SETTING

> The parched eviscerate soil
> Gapes at the vanity of toil,
> Laughs without mirth.
> This is the death of earth.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

The Physical Background

Internally, the part of Mexico known as "La Mixteca" is customarily regarded to be comprised of three sub-regions - the Mixteca de la Costa, the Mixteca Baja, and the Mixteca Alta.[1] (See Figure 2.) Such a division was perceived by the Dominican friar Antonio de los Reyes, who was vicar of the monastery of Teposcolula in the Mixteca Alta towards the end of the sixteenth century and who made the distinction in his grammar, Arte en Lengua Mixteca, published in Mexico City in 1593.[2] The division is best understood as being an environmental as opposed to a cultural designation, although the three areas have experienced slightly different historical processes and are therefore likely, upon deeper investigation, to reveal certain cultural differences.[3]

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[1] R. Spores, The Mixtec Kings and Their People, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), p. 4.

[2] M. A. Smith, Picture Writing From Ancient Southern Mexico: Mixtec Place Signs and Maps, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), pp. 3 and 7.

[3] R. S. Ravicz and A. K. Romney, "The Mixtec," Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vol. 7, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 369.

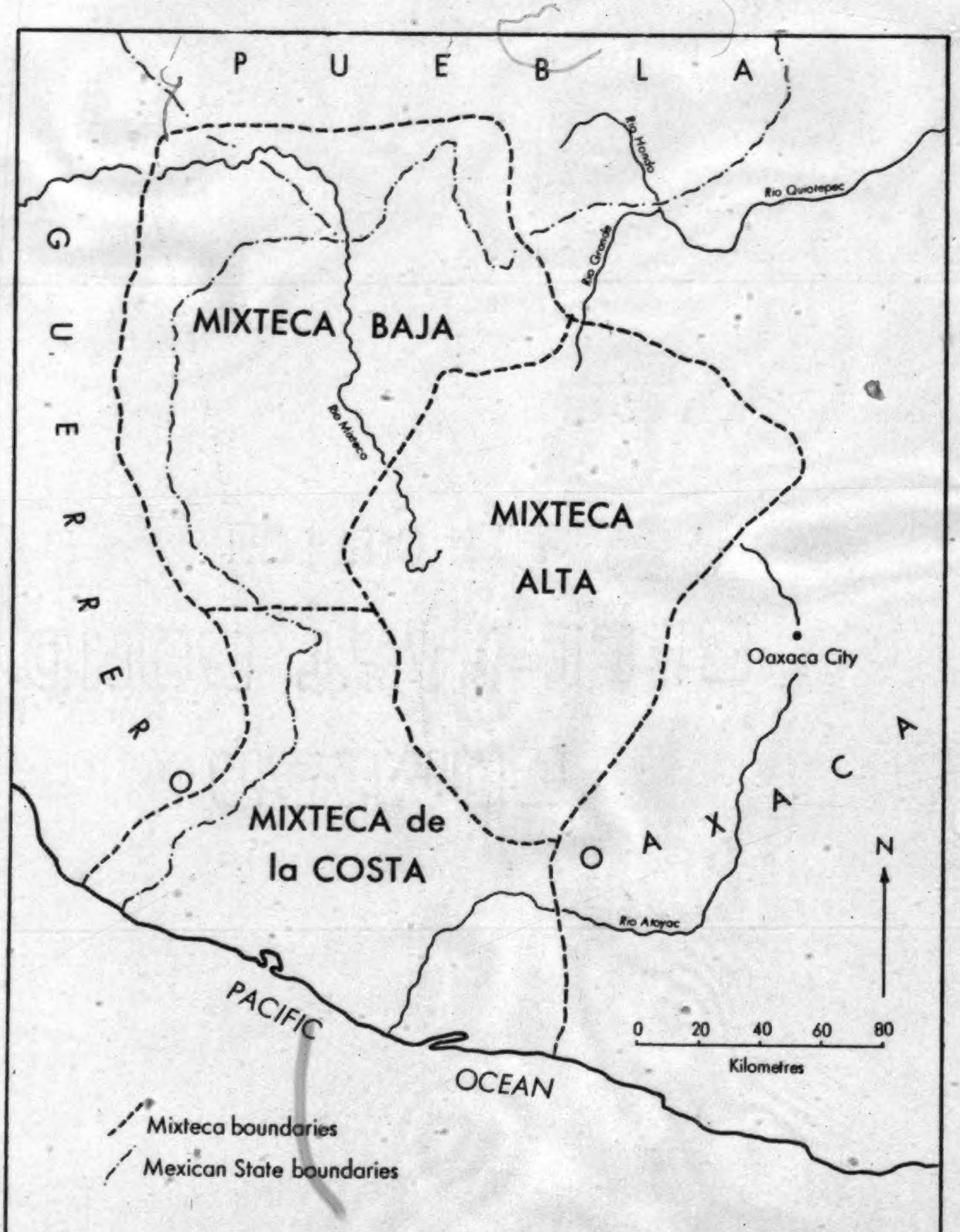

Figure 2- The Approximate Boundaries of the Mixteca Alta, Mixteca Baja, and the Mixteca de la Costa

Source - M. A. Smith, *Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico, Mixtec Place Signs and Maps*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973

The Mixteca de la Costa comprises the southern and southwestern parts of the Mixtec realm. With altitudes ranging from sea level to around 3,500 feet, the Mixteca de la Costa includes a substantial part of the tierra caliente, the hot region, and is essentially a tropical savannah environment covered by a low forest of predominantly deciduous trees, with thick growths of thorny scrub and columnar cactus also present.[4] All of the Mixteca Baja and most of the Mixteca Alta are within the tierra templada, or temperate zone, and have elevations ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 feet, with herbaceous and prairie-type vegetation prolific. The upper parts of the Mixteca Alta beyond about 6,000 feet are tierra fria, or cold zones, having a dry to semihumid climate; in these areas early summer frosts are by no means uncommon and can have a disasterous impact on crop yields.[5] The Mixteca Alta comprises the northeast and centre while the Mixteca Baja contains the western and northwestern parts of the Mixteca extending westwards into the Balsas basin.

Three drainage systems accommodate the surface runoff of the Mixteca, two systems draining to the Pacific Ocean and one discharging into the Gulf of Mexico. In the northeast, in the valleys of

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[4] R. C. West and J. P. Augelli, "Middle America - Its Lands and People," (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 48.

[5] M. T. de la Peña, "Problemas Sociales y Economicos de las Mixtecas," Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista, Vol. 2, No. 1, Mexico, (1950), p. 19, records that the crops of the community of Teposcolula in the Mixteca Alta were badly affected by early frosts in 1927, 1942, 1944 and 1948. For this community, the 1940s must have been a bleak and miserable decade for in addition to three damaging summer frosts in the abovementioned years, Teposcolula, in 1946, was struck by a catastrophic hailstorm which resulted in a poor and meagre harvest. With the majority of the population dependent on the maize crop, these recurrent natural hazards obviously make for a precarious subsistence.

Coixtlahuaca and Santa María Ixcatlán, streams flow into the Rio Grande, a tributary of the mighty Papaloapan, and henceforth into the Gulf of Mexico about fifty miles southeast of Veracruz. Most of the Mixteca, however, is associated with Pacific-oriented drainage systems. In the north and northwest, streams flow into the Río Mixteco or Río Atoyac; these rivers in turn flow into the Río Balsas which discharges into the Pacific at Melchor Ocampo. The south and southwestern parts of the Mixteca drain into the Río Verde or one of its tributaries and eventually into the Pacific near Tututepec.[6]

In general, land is higher in the north and elevation decreases towards the south, west and east. The Mixteca Alta, as its name suggests, is an elevated core and is isolated from the trend of the remainder of the central Mexican plateau to the east by the tectonic depression known as La Cañada. To the west and south lies the lower relief of the Mixteca Baja and the Mixteca de la Costa, respectively.

Fluvial erosion and a series of tectonic movements have modified the surface of the original Mixteca component of the central Mexican plateau into a myriad of valleys and basins which have been the principal centres of human settlement for over two thousand years. The largest and historically most important valley of the Mixteca is the Valley of Nochixtlán, ranging in width from five to ten kilometres and measuring approximately twenty-five kilometres in length.[7] (Plate 2.)

---

[6] S. F. Cook and W. Borah, The Population of the Mixteca Alta: 1520-1960, Ibero-Americana: 50, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 7.

[7] R. Spores, "Settlement, Farming Technology and Environment in the Nochixtlán Valley," Science, October 31, (1969), Vol. 166, No. 3905, p. 558.

Plate 2 The Valley of Nochixtlán at Yanhuitlán, looking westwards.

Smaller valley systems characterise the landscape at Teposcolula, Coixtlahuaca, Tamazulapan, Tlaxiaco, and Juxtlahuaca. (Figure 3.)

Precipitation regimes in the Mixteca correspond to the patterns found throughout central and southern Mexico, with some variations at the local level. Rainfall is high in the Mixteca de la Costa, lower in the Mixteca Baja, and lowest in the dry uplands of the Mixteca Alta. (Graphs 1, 2 and 3.) Most precipitation takes place during the summer months, although the Mixteca Alta occasionally experiences winter storms brought by northerly winds blowing inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The summer rains generally occur in the form of violent thunderstorms during the afternoon and evening.

The concentration of rainfall into the summer months from May through to October poses one of the Mixteca's most persistent environmental problems, as sporadic and intense falls of rain are largely responsible for many of the region's chronic erosion syndromes, characteristic especially of the Mixteca Alta. For the greater part of the year, the streams or arroyos of the Mixteca Alta are dry or contain but little water. Towards the end of May, relatively light rains may give way to a heavy cloudburst which, in the space of an afternoon, can fill stream channels to a capacity sufficient to bring about the rapid removal of earth, stones, and small rocks. Rivulets draining from the hillslopes of the Mixteca Alta to a larger stream in turn begin a process of soil removal and together with the main stream channels instigate a steady process of detrition; in this way, each year, more and more potentially cultivable land is lost to the fluvial forces of nature.

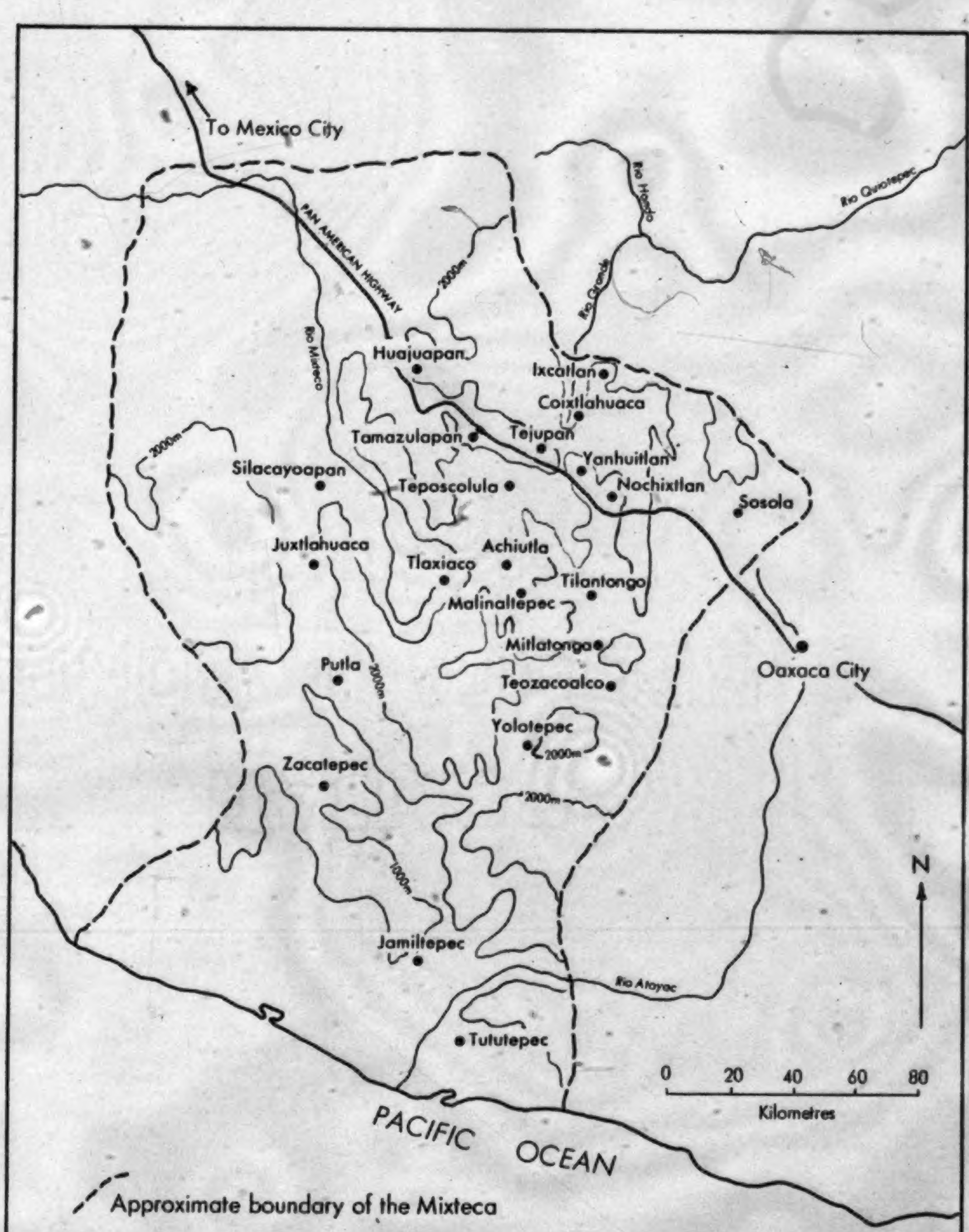
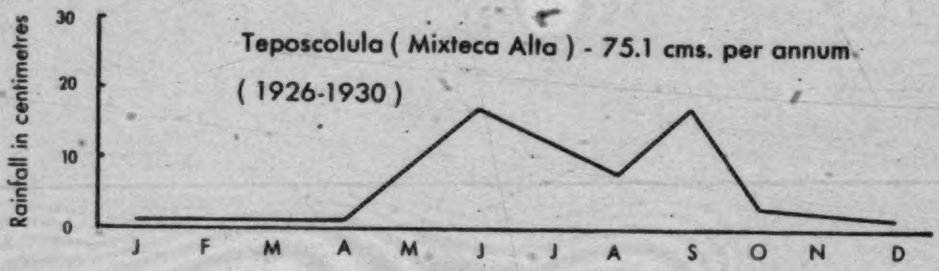


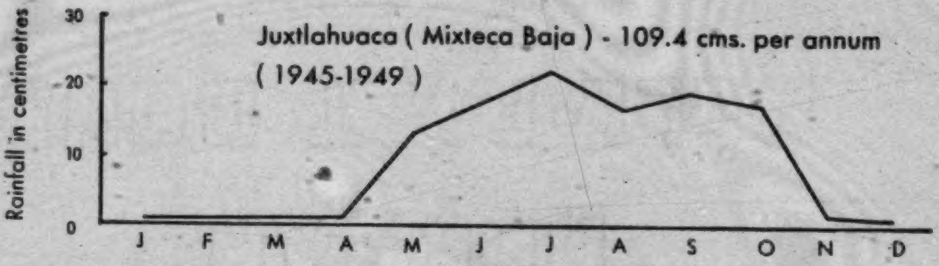
Figure 3- The Principal Communities of the Mixteca

Source - M. A. Smith, *Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico, Mixtec Place Signs and Maps*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973

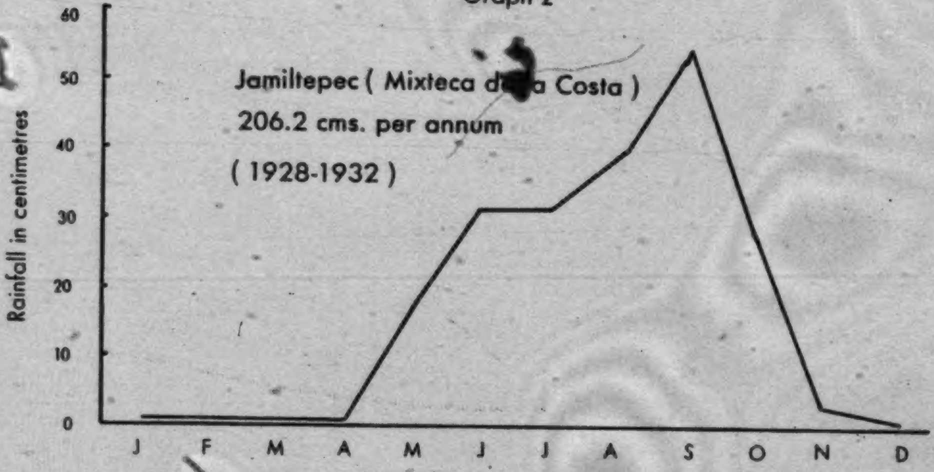
Rainfall Regimes of the Mixteca Alta (Teposcolula), the Mixteca Baja (Juxtlahuaca), and the Mixteca de la Costa (Jamiltepec)



Graph 1



Graph 2



Graph 3

Source - M.T. de la Pena, *Problemas Sociales y Economicos de las Mixtecas, Memorias del Instituto Nacional Indigenista,* Volume 2, No.1 Mexico, 1950

Rainfall constitutes yet another natural hazard by virtue of its high variability from one year to the next. Thus, for example, in Juxtlahuaca between 1906 to 1913, the annual rainfall varied from 53 mm to 774 mm; in Coixtlahuaca during the same years the variation was from 85 mm to 575 mm and in Nochixtlán between 1927 and 1936 rainfall varied from 152 mm to 651 mm.[8] Drought years, widespread crop failures, and consequent hard and hungry winters are therefore very much a reality of life, especially to the people of the Mixteca Alta; such was their experience in 1949 when a virtually rainless summer resulted in the total loss of the maize crop in the communities of Nochixtlán, Teposcolula, Tlaxiaco, and Coixtlahuaca.[9]

The Human Background

Although three distinct natural or environmental habitats can be identified, subsistence patterns throughout the Mixteca are firmly based on a single crop pattern - the cultivation of maize, beans and squash. Maize, everywhere, is the fundamental subsistence crop. To the Mixteca *campesino* the growing of this crop is more than simply a routine necessity; for him it is a way of life, has been so for centuries, and despite the waves of change rippling constantly through peasant life, will continue to be for many years to come.

In addition to the three staples of maize, beans and squash, the Mixtec diet is supplemented by the fruits papaya, anona, mango and banana, while peaches and pomegranates are also grown. Chile and tomatoes are always close at hand and some cacao is found in the Mixteca de la Costa. Due to the intermittent nature of much of the drainage network, there is little freshwater fishing, but small scale hunting is important, with rabbits, partridge and the occasional deer providing a meat component. Chickens and turkeys are ubiquitous and a variety of wild herbs and plants are gathered to diversify further the family diet.[10] All these above-mentioned products move freely from one part of the Mixteca to another.

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[8] S. F. Cook, *Santa María Ixcatlán: Habitat, Population and Subsistence*, Ibero-Americana: 41, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), p. 9.

[9] M. T. de la Peña, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

Throughout much of the Mixteca, crops are raised by the age-old agricultural technique of slash and burn, involving the clearing of small plots of land and the burning of dried branches and logs. The residual wood-ash, containing such rich minerals as phosphorus and potassium, then serves as a good fertilizer for crops which are planted at the start of the rains in May and harvested some three to six months later. Crop yields are good for the first few years, but then diminish, and after about four to five years continual cultivation, the plot is abandoned for perhaps eight to twenty years to permit rejuvenation of the soil and allow forest, shrub, and grass growth to be re-established. Attention is then focused on neighbouring plots until they too become exhausted, by which time the fertility of the other parcels of land previously worked has hopefully been replenished. In this way a cycle of cropping and abandonment is established, with the farmer continually shifting his focus of activity.

Landholding systems operative in the Mixteca entail private ownership, collective ownership and a combination of both.[11] Under the private system of ownership, land may be disposed of at will as it is the rightful and personal property of an individual. Collective ownership, however, embraces the community as a whole and as land belongs to the entire community, no single person has the right to sell his plots, though he does have the right to designate heirs. Frequently, these two types of ownership are practised side by side, with cropland being held privately and grazing and wooded land, often referred to as the monte, being held communally. Usufruct of collectively-owned land is generally determined by village officials. Most communities are affected to a variable degree by ejido legislation, whereby both arable and grazing land is the collective property of the village and is controlled as such.[12]

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[10] Ravicz and Romney, op. cit., p. 372.

A Mixtec farmer usually works several non-contiguous plots of land scattered at varying distances from each other around a focus of population.[13] Because of the distant location of some fields, the daily walk from the home out to the land to be worked can last as long as two hours. As in ancient times, the coa, or digging stick, and the hoe are the basic implements of the Indian subsistence farmer.[14] Most of the agricultural work is done by men and older boys, but at planting and harvest the women of the family also lend assistance. For the few days when the work is intensive, the whole household may erect small temporary huts, known as chozas, at the scene of labour, where they live until the work load diminishes.[15]

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[11] M. T. de la Peña, op. cit., pp. 35-49 discusses at some length the ownership of land in the Mixteca and has detailed breakdowns for each district concerning the amount worked as ejidos, comunales, and so forth.

[12] M. T. de la Peña, op. cit., p. 37.

[13] Ravicz and Romney, op. cit., p. 389.

[14] Robert S. Ravicz, "Organizacíon Social de los Mixtecos," Instituto Nacional Indigena, (Mexico City, 1965), p. 35.

Planting and harvest are significant events in Mixtec Indian life and are accompanied by ritual services undertaken to placate the spirits which the Indian believes inhabit the natural world. Before labour begins, offerings of copal (incense), candles, and animal sacrifices are made to Sabi, the spirit of the rains, and Tabayuku, the spirit of the hills.[16] Rituals take place either in the fields or in caves in the nearby hillsides, the rites being performed on natural rock or man-made shrines at these locations.[17] If offerings are not made, it is believed that the spirits will be offended and will retort by spoiling the crops sown through too little or too much rain. Land is thus perceived by the Indian as a living entity, a force of nature with its own dynamic personality which must always be respected and never abused; the emotional and spiritual bond which the Indian feels between himself and the land cannot be overstressed.

The Mixteca contains no large urban centres, but is rather a land of scattered towns of one thousand to three thousand inhabitants, around which are grouped village and hamlet communities. The densest concentrations of people are to be found in those valleys of the Mixteca Alta and Mixteca Baja with temperate climates and relatively fertile soils, such as the valleys of Nochixtlán, Coixtlahuaca, Teposcolula, Juxtlahuaca, and Tlaxiaco. For administration purposes, the region is divided into distritos and municipios, each of which has a cabecera, or head town, set amidst open rural territory and surrounded by several low-order settlements.

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[15] S. F. Cook, Santa María Ixcatlán, op. cit., p. 27.

[16] Ravicz, op. cit., p. 39.

[17] Ravicz and Romney, op. cit., p. 373.

The cabecera functions as a market and service centre for the smaller dispersed communities of the surrounding area and generally contains a block of administrative offices, a market place, a church, a school, a surgery, and a few commercial premises. Within such centres, for example Jamiltepec in the Mixteca de la Costa and Juxtlahuaca in the Mixteca Baja, Indian residents occupy one particular quarter, usually referred to as a barrio, and interact only occasionally with the Mestizo element of the town.[18]

Although Sherburne Cook identifies three distinct styles of domestic habitat at Santa María Ixcatlán, in the Mixteca Alta,[19] the dominant house type throughout rural Mixteca is a low, rectangular, and windowless structure with walls of adobe, brushwood, or wattle and daub. (Plate 3.) Roofs are most commonly made of palm thatch and slope inwards to head or shoulder level. Recently, tin and corrugated iron have been used as a roofing material. A single entrance gives access to a room measuring about twelve feet by twenty, in which all members of the family sleep. Although some two room structures occur, the traditional one-room structure is still most prolific.

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[18] K. Romney and R. Romney in their study of Juxtlahuaca, The Mixtecans of Juxtlahuaca, Mexico, New York: John Wiley, 1966, discovered that a situation of great stress exists between the pure Indian component of the town and the Mestizo counterpart. The Mixtec Indians, who are physically isolated from the rest of the town and who live in the barrio of Santo Domingo, are effectively treated as inferior beings by their Mestizo neighbours; for example, the Indians farm the poorer land of the surrounding hillsides while the Mestizos work the more fertile and irrigated valley land. Social as well as economic prejudices were uncovered by the Romneys; on their way to school, which leads them through the Mestizo part of town, Indian children are frequently spoken to in a derisory manner and at school often find themselves being faced-up to by aggressive Mestizo children. Life in the segregated barrio of Santo Domingo is depicted as being one of chronic poverty, but the eternal struggle for food and the contempt hurled upon him by the Mestizo never tear the heart of the Indian from the barrio; even those who migrate elsewhere in search of a better world always return to their home in the end.

[19] Cook, Santa María Ixcatlán, op. cit., p. 57.

The material possessions of a household are scanty and contain few items which are not put to constant use. Furnishings consist of a range of cooking utensils laid on the dirt floor or hung on the wall, a number of woven palm mats on which the family sleeps, and a few low chairs. A roughly-hewn wooden table functions also as an altar and holds candles, incense, herbs, and some religious keep-sakes. Images of the Virgin de Guadalupe or the Saints may decorate a wall and watch over all those who enter the house.[20]

In the rural areas, most dwelling houses are associated with smaller neighbouring structures, particularly the troje or cozcomate, used to store corn, and some with a cook shack. The troje is usually built of logs and adobe, with a palm or brush roof, whereas cooking, if not done inside the house, is undertaken in a rudimentary brush hut. Wood from the encino (oak) and ocote (pine) is used to erect a small corral for sheep and goats while a shelter consisting of a brush roof on posts serves for horses, mules, burros, oxen, and pigs.[21]

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[20] Ravicz and Romney, op. cit., p. 385.

[21] Ravicz and Romney, op. cit., p. 385

Plate 3 Mixtec houses near Coixtlahuaca.

Although life and the daily pattern of activity are based firmly on winning a subsistence from the land, a variety of non-agricultural pursuits, including weaving, pottery, and candlemaking, are important and can serve to supplement the family income. Weaving of cotton and wool is everywhere a particularly common practice and although carried out predominantly by women and older girls, men are also to be found at this activity. The working of palm is a well-recognised Mixted culture trait and this material is intensively utilised to produce a wealth of articles, including bags, mats, rain capes, rope, and sacks.[22] Straw hats, however, are the regional speciality, and surplus population apart, constitute the Mixteca's principal export, shipments being sent to such tourist centres as Puebla, Veracruz, and Mexico City; about one million straw hats are manufactured in the Mixteca each year.[23] This practice is particularly significant in Nochixtlán and Coixtlahuaca, where serious soil erosion and land shortages make it incumbent upon families to supplement their income from a non-agricultural source.[24]

Problems and Prospects

The Mixteca in the present day is a land of poverty, neglect, and deprivation, with the communities of the Mixteca Alta being in the most depressing social and economic predicament of the entire Mixtec realm.[25] A distinct atmosphere of desolation and despair inhabits the landscape of this parched and eviscerate mountain territory; the crumbling stone of once majestic monasteries, abandoned agricultural terraces, empty rivers awaiting rain, dead and dying vegetation, a gusty afternoon wind filling the air with topsoil, the red glare of the valley slopes in the bright morning sun, thousands of campesinos scratching their plots for a meagre livelihood. Each year, the people of the Mixteca Alta are at best barely able to provide themselves with enough food;[26] casting a bitter shadow, the interminable spectre of malnutrition and hardship is never too far away.

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[22] Ravicz, op. cit., p. 34.

[23] Oaxaca Gráfico - El Diario de la Provincia, May 27, 1974.

[24] Ravicz, op. cit., p. 34.

One of the most recognisable symptoms of the region's malaise is out-migration, a trend which has been in operation significantly for about the past two or three generations. Unfortunately, like many other aspects of the social scene in the Mixteca Alta, emigration has received but little attention, and only one study of any great depth, that of Douglas Butterworth for the community of Tilantongo,[27] yields interesting information.

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[25] J. Paddock, a distinguished specialist in Oaxaca studies, has described the Northern Mixteca as having "disasterous economic, geographic, and demographic conditions", J. Paddock, Ancient Oaxaca - Discoveries in Mexican Archaeology and History, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 369. Paddock's perspective is shared by S. F. Cook and W. Borah, field veterans of innumerable studies of man-land relationships throughout central Mexico, who claim that the Mixteca Alta "is one of the poorest regions in the Mexican Federation", (Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 1).

[26] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 1.

[27] D. S. Butterworth, "A Study of the Urbanization Process Among Mixtec Migrants from Tilantongo in Mexico City," America Indígena, Vol. 22, (1962), pp. 257-274.

With a population of around 3,700, Tilantongo, like most of the myriad communities of the Mixteca Alta, is an agricultural community based on the cultivation of maize and, to a lesser degree, wheat. The people of Tilantongo are spread out over a municipio area of some 260 square kilometres, thus giving a population density of about 14 persons per square kilometre.[28] However, as less than 10% of the municipio territory is suitable for cultivation, such a number of people represents a severe strain on the available land resources and, indeed, constitutes a very chronic overpopulation problem; under such conditions, many individuals and families make the decision to migrate. Butterworth is in no doubt as to the reasons and motives behind this outward drift:

> A high natural birth-rate combined with fragmentation of land, poverty of the soil, and frequent crop failures have caused many Tilantongueños to migrate to urban centres. The principal motive for migration is economic.[29]

Emigration from Tilantongo to Mexico City began in large numbers during the 1940s and since 1950 the drift to the city has accelerated to such a degree that the population of the community is now decreasing. Although the desire to improve their financial situation was foremost in the migrants' minds, an important consideration was that of education; with an illiteracy rate in Tilantongo of over 80%, the majority of the migrants interviewed expressed a strong desire to educate both themselves and their children.[30]

In absolute terms, the population of the Mixteca Alta has been increasing steadily since its nadir of 30,000 in the mid-seventeenth century.[31] However, the overall rate of increase, especially over the past twenty to thirty years, has been much slower than the national average because of heavy out-migration from the region. For example, the population of the municipio of Coixtlahuaca was 6,336 in 1940 and in 1960 was down to 4,938; during this period of time population was increasing at a rate of around 3% per annum for Mexico as a whole.[32] Similar overall decreases in population for the ten year period between 1950 and 1960 are recorded for the municipios of Nochixtlán, Teposcolula, Santa María Ixcatlán, and scores of others.[33] Therefore, although some communities, such as Tlaxiaco and Tamazulapan, register a slight increase in population, most of the Mixteca Alta's surplus population is being exported to other parts of Mexico. It is likely that investigation into the socio-economic background of migrants from communities other than Tilantongo would reveal similar circumstances and motives behind emigration to those encountered by Butterworth among ex-Tilantongueños in Mexico City.

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[28] Butterworth, op. cit., p. 260.

[29] Butterworth, op. cit., p. 260.

[30] Butterworth, op. cit., p. 270.

The inability of the land to support the increase in population at an acceptable economic level is the fundamental cause of out-migration from the region. Land is everywhere in short supply and for the past two thousand years has been experiencing a syndrome which in some communities has removed up to one-third of the area formerly under cultivation - unchecked soil erosion.[34]

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[31] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 57.

[32] West and Augelli, op. cit., p. 310.

[33] Cook and Borah, op. cit., pp. 80-88.

[34] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 467.

Of all the problems with which the communities of the Mixteca Alta have to contend, that of soil erosion is the most basic, complex, and far reaching, for it affects directly every family dependent on winning a subsistence from the land. Over much of the open rural landscape, subsoil or bedrock is exposed at the surface. At Yanhuitlán, this subsoil is the red clay of the Yanhuitlán-Huajuapan series of deposits and is responsible for the vivid complexion of the hill slopes around this community[35] (Plate 1); throughout other communities, such as Coixtlahuaca and Santa María Ixcatlán, it is tepetate which is exposed after top-soil removal.[36] The processes and consequenses of erosion at Santa María Ixcatlán are outlined by Cook:

> The existence of a tepetate base is significant in many ways. It determines the type of erosion to which agricultural lands may be subjected. Because of its frequently shallow depth, the overlying top-soil, unless bound together by forest or other permanent vegetation, tends to wash-off, ultimately leaving the tepetate exposed in white sheets that dazzle the eyes in the sun. Cultivation, particularly deep ploughing, facilitates the process, thus diminishing the depth of the soil layer. As the thinning continues, there are left exposed on the surface vast numbers of small stones and rocks which in turn make planting and cultivation more difficult. A vicious cycle is thereby set up which tends to intensify the deterioration of the soil by bringing to the surface more and more unweathered fragments of the soft tepetate. In the end, the fine soil washes out to such an extent that the field becomes nothing but a mass of rocks and has to be abandoned. This sequence of events may be seen in all its stages on the low-lying plain adjacent to the Río Ixcatlán, where great areas of once fertile maize fields have become practically useless.[37]

The two crucial factors which significantly affect soil erosion in the Mixteca Alta are firstly, the nature of the rainfall regime and secondly, the degree or amount of vegetation cover. Intense summer rainfall and its consequences on the landscape through the action of temporary fast-flowing, high-energy streams, or arroyos, have been discussed previously.[38] With respect to vegetation cover, the presence of tree, shrub, and grass communities lessens the impact of the sporadic summer rains by giving the topsoil some cohesion; conversely, an absence or paucity of tree, shrub, or grass communities increases susceptibility to erosion as the top-soil is held together only loosely, if at all, and could be removed by a heavy fall of rain. The latter biogeographic condition prevails throughout much of the Mixteca Alta due to the combined action of deforestation, the unregulated grazing of livestock, especially sheep and goats, and the widespread practice of slash and burn agriculture.[39]

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[35] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 558.

[36] Ravicz, op. cit., p. 34, claims that the sequences of soil erosion around Coixtlahuaca are the most advanced in Mexico.

[37] S. F. Cook, Santa María Ixcatlán, op. cit., p. 7.

Soil erosion has long been recognised as constituting a principal ingredient of the region's plight, but to date only the work of the Papaloapan Commission in the Coixtlahuaca area has to any marked degree combatted the denudation of the land.[40] However, with the recent disclosure of a 1,000 million peso loan from the World Bank to finance a federal campaign for the reforestation of the Mixteca, it can only be hoped that the Mexican government has now seen the urgency and need of an effective conservation and rejuvenation programme in this gutted highland territory.[41]

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[38] See p. 6.

[39] S. F. Cook, Santa María Ixcatlán, op. cit., p. 12.

[40] A field conversation with a member of the Papaloapan Commission in Coixtlahuaca established that for about the past twenty years a project of reforestation has been carried out by the Commission in the extreme northeast of the Mixteca. The reforestation programme entails the planting of seedlings, principally of oak and cedar but with a few pine species also. In addition, the commission has encouraged the cultivation of a species of nopal, or prickly pear (Optunia polycantha), a nuitritious vegetable cactus of diverse culinary use.

The Mixteca Alta, then, is one of the most acutely impoverished regions of Mexico, a land plagued by soil erosion, out-migration, and an abysmally-low material standard of living. That this should be the present predicament of a region once famous for the resourcefulness and productivity of its populous communities inevitably leads to retrospection and the need of an historically-oriented perspective to illuminate the processes and events of the past. A study of the sixteenth century facilitates the tracing back of symptoms of present-day decline to their root causes. It will be shown that the seeds of poverty, neglect, and deprivation were sown by the historical events which took place during the sixteenth century. Lengthy discussion of the present socio-economic characteristics of the Mixteca and the way of life of its inhabitants has been necessary to provide the background for a study of the changes which the cultural landscape of the Mixteca underwent four centuries ago. A detailed examination of cultural change in the sixteenth century will now be undertaken, with a spatial emphasis on the people and landscape of the Mixteca Alta.

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[41] *Oaxaca Gráfico*, June 1, 1974, carried a front page story on the World Bank loan and the prospective reforestation campaign. The *Oaxaca Fogonazo* of the same day revealed that the Mexican Secretary of Hydraulic Resources was applying to the Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo for a grant to develop a series of aquifers discovered in the Nochixtlán Valley. The Secretary claimed that there is a sufficient quantity of subterranean water to irrigate thousands of hectares of land at present not under cultivation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE LATE PRE-HISPANIC PERIOD

> After the kingfisher's wing
> Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
> At the still point of the turning world.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Origins and Growth of Mixtec Culture

The name Mixtec is of Nahuatl origin and was used by the Indian communities of the Valley of Mexico in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to describe the inhabitants of Mixtecapan, "the land of the cloud people," which lay about two hundred kilometres to the south of the great city of Tenochtitlán.[1] Like their Zapotec neighbours who occupied the fertile lands of the Valley of Oaxaca to the south and east, the Mixtec believed that they were an autochthonous people of Oaxaca.[2] Numerous myths and legends which deal with their origin have been preserved in Mixtec culture.

One legend tells that the first inhabitants of the Mixteca were the offspring of two trees growing on the banks of a river at Achiutla. One of these first offsprings was a cacique, or lord, by the name of Yacoñooy,[3] a brave and adventurous warrior. One day Yacoñooy left Achiutla in search of lands for his people to colonise, but the lands which he encountered were unpopulated, and only the sun shone brightly, high in the sky. Yacoñooy believed the sun to be lord of this territory, challenged him to fight, and shot many arrows into him. As the sun slowly set, the sky turned red, Yacoñooy believing that he had killed this mysterious lord and that it was the blood of his victim which was colouring the twilight horizon. The sun having disappeared behind the mountains in the west, Yacoñooy declared victory and claimed the territory of the sun-lord for his people. Here he founded the city of Tilantongo, or in Mixteco, Yucunoo, "Black Mountain".[4]

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[1] The Nahuatl word Mixtec is a translation of that which the Mixtec people call themselves - the cloud people.

[2] A. Caso, "The Mixtec and Zapotec Cultures," Boletin de Estudios Oaxaqueños, No. 22, (1966), p. 22.

[3] Yacoñooy is the Mixteco word for "monkey". See Caso, op. cit., p. 22.

The Franciscan friar and chronicler, Bernardino de Sahagún, however, had a less romantic version of Mixtec origins. According to the scholarly friar, the Mixtec were related to the Olmec people, who invaded northwestern Oaxaca after establishing an empire in the area of the modern Mexican states of Tlaxcala and Puebla around 800 A.D.[5] As there is much similarity between the archaeological records of the Tlaxcala-Puebla region and the Mixteca, the friar's documentation is certainly plausible.[6]

The paucity of information concerning the archaeology of the Mixteca Alta and therefore the origins and development of Mixtec culture as a whole has long been bemoaned by a number of scholars.[7] In recent years, however, the research of Ronald Spores has done much to augment knowledge of the various processes which have been operative in shaping the cultural landscape of the region. Spores' research has concentrated particularly on the Valley of Nochixtlán, which he feels to be the area most worthy of investigation:

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[4] The most complete English version of this legend is to be found in Caso, op. cit., pp. 22-23. Hubert H. Bancroft's Works - Native Races, Vol. V: Primitive History, (San Francisco, 1883), pp. 527-528 also narrates this legend in a rather less substantial form than Caso's work.

[5] J. Paddock, Ancient Oaxaca - Discoveries in Mexican Archeology and History, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 12.

[6] Caso, op. cit., p. 22.

> It was probably the singlemost important area in the Mixteca throughout its occupational history and continues to be the most fertile, productive, and intensively settled of the several valleys of the region.[8]

The earliest occupational phase identified in the Nochixtlán Valley dates back to Late Formative times, to around 700 B.C., and is believed to have lasted until about 200 B.C.; this period of occupation is termed the Cruz phase by Spores.[9] Of 130 sites examined, 21 contained features relating to Late Formative settlement and 8 are classified as being "intensively occupied or utilised."[10] The location of most of the sites was on low-lying piedmont promontories that protrude into the valley from surrounding hills and ranges. This location above but adjacent to the productive and relatively well-watered lands of the valley floor conforms to the pattern already established for the Valley of Oaxaca during Early Formative times.[11] About this primary phase of settlement much remains to speculation:

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[7] R. Spores, The Mixtec Kings and Their People, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 30-32, and I. Bernal, "The Archaeology of the Mixteca," Boletin de Estudios Oaxaqueños, No. 7, 1958.

[8] R. Spores, "Settlement, Farming Technology and Environment in the Nochixtlán Valley," Science, October 31, (1969), Vol. 166, No. 3905, p. 558.

[9] Spores, "Nochixtlan," op. cit., p. 559.

[10] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 559.

> ... very little is known of the total material culture or architecture of these early valley farmers. Some of the structures found in test trenches were built of cut or roughly-shaped stone and formed into straight-sided masonry walls which intersected to form contiguous apartment-like cells of indeterminate use. Associated shallow pits were dug for cooking, rubbish disposal, or for other purposes and were found to contain animal bones, ash, pottery griddles, large pottery fragments, manos, and metates. Very few chipped stone implements have been encountered in Cruz phase contexts.[12]

The inhabitants of Late Formative settlements tilled the lower hill slopes as well as the valley floor, although the latter, with generally more fertile, black soils would have been preferred. There was probably no pressure on land resources since so few sites were intensively occupied; the population of the entire valley at this time is estimated at around 4,000.[13]

The next phase of occupation, that of the Early Classic period, began around 200 B.C. and lasted until about 250 or 300 A.D.; Spores has termed this period of settlement the Ramos phase.[14] The number of sites associated with this phase, 56 in all, is greater than that of the Cruz phase. Early Classic communities tended to locate once more on the piedmont spurs, with some sites being established on nearby hilltops. A definite increase in the size and architectural complexity of the communities is evident, with a major characteristic being the appearance of elaborate ceremonial structures. The valley population now numbered around 10,000 with farming activities still focused on the flat lands of the valley bottom.[15]

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[11] K. V. Flannery et. al., "Farming Systems and Political Growth in Ancient Oaxaca," Science, October 27, (1967), Vol. 158, No. 3800, p. 445-454.

[12] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 559. A metate is a stone quern upon which maize kernals are ground by a rounded oblong stone, the mano, into flour. This way of grinding corn is still predominant throughout most of Indian Mexico and Central America.

[13] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 566.

[14] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 560.

Late Classic settlement is believed to have begun around 300 A.D. and to have continued until about 1100 A.D.; this period of occupation is termed the Las Flores phase by Spores.[16] During this phase the Nochixtlán Valley supported five major civic-ceremonial complexes, that of Yucuita,[17] which had emerged in the Early Classic, and four others at Yucuñudahui,[18] Etlatongo,[19] Cerro Jasmin, and Jaltepec. These complexes either had hill or mountain-top locations or clustered around buttes or ridges rising from the valley floor. In addition to the five civic-ceremonial complexes, 92 sites were associated with Late Classic occupation and the entire valley supported an estimated population of around 25,000. Settlements tended to be located at slightly higher elevations than those of earlier periods. A significant development during the Late Classic was the prolific utilisation of higher slopes using the technique of hillside terracing, a practice which enabled more land than ever before to be brought under cultivation.[20] Archaeological evidence in the form of architectural techniques and styles, ceramic inventories, and site locations also points to contact with the northern Mixtec communities in the valleys of Tamazulapan and Huajapan, and to contact with the grand civilisations centred at Teotihuacan and Monte Albán.[21]

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[15] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 560.

[16] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 560. 1100 A.D. is a rather late date for the end of the Late Classic in central Mexico. Teotihuacan collapsed in 650 A.D. (Paddock, op. cit., p. 233) and Monte Albán was abandoned before 1000 A.D. (Paddock, op. cit., p. 174); even early Post Classic Tula had fallen by 1200 A.D. (Paddock, op. cit., p. 12). It may well be that further archaeological research in the Mixteca by Spores or others will prompt a reappraisal of this date of 1100 A.D., or enable temporal breaks to be identified within the Las Flores phase.

[17] Yucuita is Mixteco for "Flowery Hill". See M. A. Smith, Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico: Mixtec Place Signs and Maps, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), p. 79.

[18] Yucuñudahui is Mixteco for "Cloud Mountain". See Caso, op. cit., p. 24.

[19] Etlatongo is Nahuatl for "little place of beans". See Cayetano Esteva, Nociones Elementales de Geographía Histórica del Estado de Oaxaca, (Oaxaca, 1913), p. 128. Also useful is Smith, op. cit., p. 78.

The Post Classic occupational phases in the Nochixtlán Valley date from about 1000 A.D. until the Spanish Conquest of the region in the early 1520s; Spores has termed this period of settlement the Natividad phase.[22] Over 100 sites reveal features of Post Classic occupation. During this phase many hilltop settlements and even some of the larger civic-ceremonial complexes were abandoned, population tending to concentrate once more along piedmont spurs and ridges. Architecturally, settlements were not as sophisticated as during the Las Flores phase, but the proliferation of broken pottery and stone suggests that communities were more extensive and more densely inhabited. Population now numbered around 50,000, which meant that unprecedented pressure was being exerted on the agricultural resources of the valley.

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[20] Spores, "Nochixtlán," *op. cit.*, p. 561.

[21] Spores, "Nochixtlán," *op. cit.*, p. 561.

[22] Spores, "Nochixtlan," *op. cit.*, pp. 561-562.

Four principal phases of occupation, then, have been established for the Nochixtlán Valley from an investigation of the archaeological palimpsest of the region. Although, as Spores and others have indicated, much basic archaeological research remains to be done, the pattern of the cultural development of other valleys in the Mixteca Alta, such as Tlaxiaco, Teposcolula, Tamazulapan, and Coixtlahuaca, is unlikely to diverge greatly from that already established for the Valley of Nochixtlán. A steady growth of population from Late Formative times until the Spanish Conquest is inferred from the increase in the number, size, and complexity of settlements occupied. Population growth, moreover, was associated with a related increase in the level of technology and the amount of land brought under cultivation. Mixtec society, in short, was evolving. Like other human groups in Mesoamerica, the people of the Mixteca Alta during the late Pre-Hispanic period had definite views about the organisation of society, and interacted with their habitat in such a way as to produce certain recurrent patterns of settlement, landholding, and agriculture.

Land and Settlement

The population of the Mixteca Alta around the turn of the sixteenth century lived in scattered, non-urban communities of varying size. These communities usually contained four main components held together in a loosely-nucleated form of settlement; firstly, a civic or administrative core, which the Spaniards termed the cabecera; secondly, several outlying hamlet dependencies, called sujetos by the Spaniards; thirdly, a religious or ceremonial precinct; and fourthly, surrounding farmland.[23]

The cabecera, sited in many instances on the break of slope between steep hillsides and the level farming lands of valley floors, was a random configuration of dwelling houses and commercial buildings surrounding a centrally-located market place. Internally, the cabecera was divided into barrios, within which lived the members of the community. Each barrio was granted to a member of the nobility for the purpose of supervision and administration, and most would reside in the barrio of their jurisdiction. Barrios were almost autonomous political units in their own right, and residents were supported by the produce of specific agricultural lands surrounding the cabecera, which each barrio had the right to farm.[24]

Barrio dwellings were generally small, windowless, cell-shaped units with flat or gently-sloping thatch roofs and packed-earth or stucco floors. Walls were made of worked stone, adobe, or wood, depending on the potential building material of the locality. Some structures, like the dwelling house of a member of the nobility or perhaps the residence of a wealthy merchant, would be conspicuously larger and more elaborately furnished and decorated, but the basic building materials remained the same.[25]

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[23] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. [illegible]0.

[24] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 92. At present there exists no convincing evidence that barrios within the cabecera comprised kinship units or lineage property holdings similar to those recorded for the Mexica of the Valley of Mexico.

Most communities were associated with smaller, outlying hamlets or sujetos. Such dependent settlements were located a few hours' to a day's walk from the cabecera, and consisted of an irregular grouping of simple dwelling houses. Within each sujeto, neighbouring buildings were frequently separated by a number of fields, and were thus not as closely spaced as those in the cabecera. The people who lived in sujetos made occasional visits to the cabecera to undertake various duties required of them there and to participate in community services and celebrations.[26]

The majority of communities in the Mixteca Alta had relatively easy access to a religious or ceremonial complex, located near or adjacent to the cabecera. Places of worship and ceremony were generally situated on dominating hill or mountain-tops, and in addition to providing the community with a focus for their religious activities, also functioned as a centre for various festivals and celebrations. A highly venerated sanctuary was Achiutla, the legendary place of origin of the Mixtec, which attracted pilgrims from every part of the Mixteca Alta.[27]

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[25] Spores, *Mixtec Kings*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

[26] Spores, *Mixtec Kings*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[27] Mixtec religion was very similar to that practised by the Mexica of the Valley of Mexico. Both paid homage to a divine pair, the Mixteca to One-Deer - Lion Snake and One-Deer - Tiger Snake, and the Mexica to Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl; the divine pair gave birth to all other gods and goddesses. Common ground also existed between the Mixtec and the Mexica with respect to the worship of the sun and the practice of human sacrifice. Quetzalcoatl, the god of life and air, was an important deity for the Mixtec; he was the Mixtec tribal hero in much the same way as Huitzilpochtli was to the Mexica.

The fourth component of communities was the agricultural and collecting lands surrounding the cabecera, sujetos, and the ceremonial complex. Farmed intensively, the productivity and output of these lands formed the foundations upon which the prosperity of the communities of the Mixteca Alta primarily rested. Within communities, two distinct landholding units could be distinguished; firstly, the lands of the community and secondly, the lands of the nobility.[28]

Mixtec community land was distributed among peasant recipients on an allotment basis, a pattern very similar to that of the system of land distribution practised by the Mexica in the Valley of Mexico.[29] Community agricultural holdings were plots of land to which recipients and their dependents had usufructuary rights, but which were the property of the community as a whole. In this sense, individuals could not legally own tracts of community land, but rather received the privilege of working plots entrusted by the community to their care.

The lands of the nobility were private estates held by high-ranking royal lineages and were worked in a joint effort by groups of servile commoners.[30] Of these lands by far the most extensive and productive belonged to the cacique, the term used by the Spaniards for the native ruler of each community. Land belonging to the cacique was known as the cacicazgo and was, like the later Spanish-derived hacienda, a veritable socio-economic institution. The major characteristics of the cacicazgo are outlined by Spores:

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[28] S. F. Cook and W. Borah, The Population of the Mixteca Alta (1520-1960), Ibero-Americana: 50, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 14-15.

[29] The Mexica procedure of land distribution on a family allotment basis within the boundaries of the calpulli, or kinship grouping, is discussed in detail in Chapter 12 of Charles Gibson's The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1964.

[30] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 15.

> The cacicazgo ... was institutional in nature rather than territorial. It consisted of the sum total of the duties, prerogatives, goods, and properties, and the prestige, power, and influence derived from and pertaining to the title and position of a native ruler - cacique. Although these constituent elements of a cacicazgo were normally related to a single community, it must be noted that in some cases, like that of Yanhuitlán, caciques claimed, as part of their royal patrimony, goods and properties located within the territorial limits of another community.[31]

Cacicazgos in the Mixteca Alta were of varying size but certainly large by the standards of the allotments of commoners, the cacicazgo of Yanhuitlán just after the arrival of the Spaniards being estimated at slightly under one thousand acres.[32]

Further research by Ronald Spores has revealed two different patterns of settlement for the communities of the Mixteca Alta in the early sixteenth century. Type number one Spores identifies as containing all four components discussed above, and can be thought of as a cabecera with outlying hamlet dependencies. Type number two, on the other hand, had only three of the components mentioned, namely a cabecera, a ceremonial precinct, and surrounding farmland, and can be thought of as a cabecera without outlying dependencies. Of twenty-four communities examined by Spores, thirteen were of type number one, and eight were of type number two, while three communities did not conform exactly to either pattern. Essentially, different combinations of four distinct components gave Mixtec communities two basic settlement patterns.[33]

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[31] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 155.

[32] R. Spores, "The Zapotec and Mixtec at Spanish Contact," Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vol. 3, Part II, (Austin: Texas University Press, 1965), p. 978.

Consideration of a number of factors facilitates an explanation of the morphology of the characteristic settlement patterns of the Mixteca Alta. The tendency to congregate around a centre reflects the communal spirit of Mixtec culture, for although community allotments were probably farmed on an individual family basis, such tasks as the clearing of vegetation and the excavation and maintenance of irrigation canals required an organised, co-operative effort; a nucleated community therefore made easier the co-ordination of people for various collective projects.[34] In addition, defence and protection must have also been foremost in mind, particularly during the instabilities of the Post Classic period, when inter-valley warfare was widespread and the Mixteca Alta as a whole was threatened by the expansion and encroachment of the powerful Culhua Mexica south from the Valley of Mexico.

Population during the early years of the sixteenth century was therefore concentrated in dispersed clusters, principally for reasons of community co-ordination and protection. A conspicuous feature of the layout of communities was the division of farmland into two distinctive landholding units, one for the use of the commoners and the other for the use of privileged ruling lineages. Such a division in the fundamental material possession of Mixtec society simply reflected the very real division that existed within that society.

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[33] Spores, _Mixtec Kings_, _op_. _cit_., pp. 110-113.

[34] W. Sanders and B. Price, _Mesoamerica - The Evolution of a Civilization_, (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 176.

The Social Scene

Mixtec society during late pre-Hispanic times was divided into two broad social classes, the nobility and the commoners, each of which housed numerous sub-groups.[35] The nobility was comprised of two groups, caciques and principales, while at least five groups can be distinguished within the commoners, namely artisans, cargadores, macehuales, mayeques, and slaves. In addition two groups of influence pervaded society, the priesthood and commercially-oriented merchants and traders.

A cacique was the hereditary ruler of an entire community and, as such, was a very privileged individual, having the right to exact a personal levy of tribute from his community, as well as being a wealthy landholder. Resident in the cabecera with his family and relatives, the cacique and his immediate kin constituted a powerful ruling caste who lived off the toil and output of the commoners. The authority of the caciques of Yanhuitlán[36] was attested by a number of older people questioned by the Spaniards about life in the Mixteca Alta before the conquest:

> ... the witness[es] stated ... that in the time of the infidelity of the Indians, the natives of this pueblo of Yanhuitlán and its subjects recognised their caciques and señores in every way and served and respected them in everything, providing them with personal services, working fields for the sustenance of their houses, and gave them great quantities of clothing, precious stones, precious feathers from Guatemala, fowl, and all that they

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[35] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 13.

[36] Yanhuitlán is derived from the Nahuatl "Yancuitlán" which means "new place". Its Mixteco name, Yodzo Cahi, means "wide plain". For fuller discussion see José Gorbea Trueba, Yanhuitlán, a publication of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, (Mexico, 1962), p. 7, and Smith, op. cit., p. 63 and p. 80.

> asked and commanded as señores absolutos of the said pueblo and its province, until the arrival of the Spaniards.[37]

Principales, who constituted the majority of the nobility, were a lesser elite whose major role was the administration of government and the maintenance of law and order among the community.[38] As officials, they received their appointments and assignments from the cacique and were required to supervise affairs either in a barrio of the cabecera or in a sujeto in the countryside.[39] Their duties also included the collection of tribute and the organisation of the commoners for community projects, such as land clearance, canal construction and rehabilitation, and military service.[40] Like the cacique, principales were exempt from a tributary levy and were supported by the energies of the commoners, receiving services, food, and other commodities either as a reward for executing community functions or from their private estates.[41]

Together, therefore, caciques and principales constituted the dominant social and political forces operative within Mixtec communities. As the nobility, they were clearly set apart from the remainder of society, and maintained their privileges by adhering to rigid patterns of lineal descent. Moreover, strong kinship ties existed within the nobility which in some cases reached beyond the boundaries of one community into another adjacent to it.[42] In this way the status quo was firmly preserved from generation to generation and life in the communities of the Mixteca Alta dominated, without interruption, by powerful ruling lineages.

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[37] Taken from a sixteenth century legal document housed in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, and cited in Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 157.

[38] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 14.

[39] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 94.

[40] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 94.

[41] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 14.

The bulk of the commoners was comprised of macehuales, freemen who were entitled to the right to farm an individual allotment of community land in return for a variety of services and tribute.[43] Much of the productive capacity of this group was channeled into the maintenance of the nobility and the priesthood, and as commoners they were subject to restrictions pertaining to certain aspects of clothing and diet; a macehual, for example, was permitted to eat meat only on certain occasions, such as a religious festival or the marriage of a member of the nobility.[44]

Also holding "freeman" status were guilds of artisans and craftsmen whose skills were once more exploited and enjoyed by the nobility and the priesthood. The high quality and elegance of Mixtec craftwork was renowned throughout Mesoamerica during late Post Classic times; the Mexican archaeologist Alfonso Caso has hailed the Mixtec achievement in the fine arts as outstanding by any standards:

> It may be said without exaggeration that the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Greeks, the Etruscans, and the Romans all failed to achieve the perfection of workmanship which characterised the Mixtec goldsmiths. We must go to Renaissance Europe to find artists comparable to them. The Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth century speak with amazement of the technical skill shown by the

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[42] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., pp. 131-154.

[43] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 14.

[44] Spores, "Spanish Contact," op. cit., p. 967.

> Indian goldsmiths. When their products appeared in Europe, the best goldsmiths were surprised to discover some pieces which they did not know how to make.[45]

Besides the working of gold, high quality craftsmanship was also achieved in the working of silver, jade, alabaster, wood, and in the field of pottery. Miguel Covarrubias neatly summarises the aesthetic and artistic achievement of the Mixtec:

> In the applied arts the Mixtecs were master craftsmen; they created the finest style of decorative pottery - the Cholula polychrome; produced the most spectacular ornaments of gold, the finest gems of jade, crystal, turquoise, and so forth. In general it can be said that they were little concerned with monumental art, but concentrated on the decorative and precious, with an emphasis on highly developed techniques and fine craftsmanship.[46]

Mayeques constituted a group of unfree commoners who worked on the lands and in the homes of the nobility and were entirely subordinate to either a cacique or principal. Being of serf-like status and having few, if any, civil rights, mayeques, unlike macehuales, were not entitled to a tract of community land and were therefore wholly at the mercy of their masters.[47] No formal tribute levy was placed on them as they were essentially a servile class whose labour and effort were solely for the benefit of the nobility in any case. Exemption from tribute also applied to a noble's slaves, who shared with the mayeques an unfree and menial status at the base of society.

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[45] Caso, op. cit., p. 28. Unfortunately, few pieces of Mixtec goldwork have survived to the present day, owing chiefly to the insatiable Spanish desire for bullion which was responsible for the melting down of most gold objects and ornaments during the sixteenth century. Caso's excavation of Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, however, has ensured that at least some examples of Mixtec goldwork will survive as works of art. This tomb, excavated in 1932, was found to contain a wealth of objects made of materials considered precious by the people of Mesoamerica: gold and silver, in the form of necklaces, pectorals, rings and bracelets, turquoise, pearl, mother of pearl, jade, copper, alabaster or tecali, amber, jet, rock crystal, obsidian, and the decorated bones of humans, jaguars, and eagles. This beautiful collection is displayed in the Museo del Estado in the Iglesia de Santo Domingo in Oaxaca City.

[46] M. Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America, (New York: A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 310-311.

[47] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 15.

Also present and functional within society were two extremely important groups of influence - the priesthood and merchants. In such a profoundly religious society as that of the Mixtec, it was inevitable that the priesthood should come to command an office of great power and prestige. Controlling not only patterns of worship but functioning also as a source of consultation and information for the nobility, the priesthood was rewarded for its services with the privilege of receiving tribute from the commoners. Mixtec priests, called taysaqui, were keen astronomers, and in conjunction with the best artists were responsible for the creation of picture manuscripts concerning the history of their people.[48]

Another very influential faction were the merchants who controlled the trade and commerce of communities. Long distance trade was an especially lucrative concern, with merchants being instrumental in organising groups of cargadores to transport goods from one part of the Mixteca to another; frequently, an assignment would take the cargadores outside the Mixteca and into other parts of Mesoamerica. Cargadores were professional human carriers who covered hundreds of miles distributing wares which they carried on their backs throughout Oaxaca, and were responsible for the carriage of various commodities, such as cotton from Jalapa and Nejapa, and salt, metals, precious stones, feathers, fish, and animal skins from Tehuantepec.[49] The merchants who organised inter-valley and long-distance trade in the Mixteca probably constituted a small but affluent social group in much the same way as the pochteca or oztomeca did in Mexica society.[50]

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[48] Six of these picture manuscripts, known as the Mixtec codices, have miraculously survived. Each codex is made of a series of folded leather strips upon which are painted coloured figures and hieroglyphics which tell of the history of the major Mixtec genealogies. One codex, known as the Selden codex, provides a continuous genealogical history covering 762 years, from 794 A.D. until 1556. According to Alfonso Caso, who has spent many years interpreting their content, the codices "served as frameworks to remind the man reciting a history of the names of the personages depicted, their birth dates, their weddings, or their deaths as well as the dates of their conquests, the dates on which they had carried out the ceremonies that consecrated them as lords or Tecuhtli, or the dates when they became the rulers of their people." (A. Caso, Interpretacíon del Codice Selden 3135 (A2), Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, Mexico, 1964, p. 68.) The codices also recorded kinship groupings, alliances, and the names of communities conquered during warfare.

Mixtec society on the eve of the Spanish Conquest was thus made up of a mosaic of groups of differing status, each with their own destinies, roles to perform, and duties to carry out. Society was broadly divided into two classes, the nobility and the commoners, each of which internally accomodated differing sub-groups. Also present and exercising an influence in the affairs of the communities were the priesthood and merchants. The nobility and the priesthood were essentially privileged social groups and were maintained by the labour of the commoners, a relationship which owed much to the productivity of agriculture.

Agriculture and Land Utilisation

The dense, valley-based population of the Mixteca Alta was supported in the late pre-Hispanic period by a diversified and well-developed agriculture. A large number of domesticated plants were raised using several agricultural techniques developed either within the region or assimilated from peripheral areas with which contact had long been established, such as the Puebla-Cholula region, the Tehuacan Valley, or the Valley of Oaxaca.[51] Through the steadily increasing efficiency of agriculture, characteristic of the Late Formative period onwards, food surpluses were produced, freeing some members of the community from this fundamental task and enabling them to pursue other fields of interest for the ultimate benefit and advancement of society as a whole. In the words of Eric Wolf:

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[49] Spores, "Spanish Contact," op. cit., pp. 967-968.

[50] E. Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 63.

> A society which can divert some of its members from the food quest into full-time specialisation can at the same time free skills and knowledge from the narrow confines of the individual household and speed their development into a multitude of crafts and occupations.... Surpluses are... more dependable and need no longer be ploughed back to meet needs of elementary subsistence; cultivation and its yields seem more assured. It was thus possible for groups of men to develop a lien on the disposal of that surplus, to employ it for ends which transcended subsistence. If it is true that man does not live by bread alone, he must first attend to gaining the daily bread that keeps him alive. Yet no human society restricts its purposes to the pursuit of the food quest; as soon as this basic need is met, it raises its sights and strives to transcend its earthbound limitations.[52]

Agriculture, therefore, formed the cornerstone of the emergent Mixtec culture and was the foundation upon which the prosperity and development of life throughout all Mesoamerica was essentially based. Permanent agriculture was centred around the cultivation of maize, beans, and squash, a combination referred to by Wolf as "the Trinity of the American Indian".[53] Yielding a fairly well-balanced diet, this staple plant trilogy, through centuries of cultivation, developed in the Mixteca Alta, as elsewhere throughout Mesoamerica, a symbiotic relationship in which the maize stalk served as a support for the climbing bean while squashes occupied the space and soil below. Supplementing the diet were chile peppers, tomatoes, a variety of fruits and herbs, and maguey, the last-mentioned being a multi-purpose plant suited to cultivation in less productive upland areas, and used either for its fibre or for the preparation of the drink, pulque. Meat consumption was low and was confined mainly to the nobility, there being few domestic animals in the agricultural economy.

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[51] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 559 and pp. 567-568.

[52] E. Wolf, op. cit., p. 19 and p. 69.

According to field studies undertaken by Sherburne Cook in numerous localities throughout the Mixteca Alta, agriculture has been practised in the region for the past three thousand to five thousand years.[54] Agricultural methods and technology varied between different environmental niches. William Sanders and Barbara Price have correlated "ecological types" and "systems of cultivation" for numerous culture zones of Mesoamerica, and their correlations establish two basic agricultural systems for the communities of the Mixteca Alta: firstly, swidden, or slash and burn farming, on the steep, broken terrain of the upper slopes, and secondly, varying forms of infield-outfield farming in the more fertile lands of valley floors.[55]

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[53] E. Wolf, op. cit., pp. 19 and 69.

[54] S. F. Cook, Soil Erosion and Population in Central Mexico, Ibero-Americana: 34, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), pp. 2-24 and 79-86.

[55] Sanders and Price, op. cit., pp. 101-105, and 145-151. Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 9, also suggest this two-fold division of agriculture for the region during pre-Hispanic times.

Swidden agriculture entailed the clearing of vegetation by fire towards the end of the dry season and cultivating the area burned until diminishing crop yields were experienced. When this stage was reached, fields were abandoned for perhaps eight to twenty years and other plots in the surrounding area opened up for exploitation in a similar fashion. In this way a shifting pattern of agriculture was established on the less manageable upper hill slopes involving the continual relocation of the area of cultivation.

Infield-outfield was a much more intensive agricultural system, incorporating the permanent cultivation of favoured and fertile areas of land in conjunction with the sporadic farming of a less-productive and unwieldy hinterland. In the Zapotec communities of the Valley of Oaxaca, the zone of infield was developed on areas of high water table and alluvial soils, while the adjacent hill slopes, with their increased susceptibility to erosion and higher probability of experiencing frosts, constituted the outfield. Areas of infield in the Mixteca Alta were located similarly on valley floors and were irrigated by water drawn from canal networks running from hillsides down on to the valley bottom.[56]

The significance of irrigation in the cultural development of the various peoples of Mesoamerica has long been recognised. In the words of Sanders and Price:

> ... irrigation was widespread in Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish Conquest, dates back to at least the Late and Terminal Formative phases and was of considerable

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[56] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 9.

demographic and, derivatively, of political and economic importance.[57]

Unlike the Zapotec of the Valley of Oaxaca, the Indians of the Mixteca Alta appear not to have practised riego a brazo, or pot-irrigation, but the technique of canal irrigation was known to them and was extensively applied.[58] Under this system, water was diverted from streams into a network of canals and carried down to the communities located on piedmont spurs, where a "master-canal" distributed water to the surrounding fields. The practice of canal irrigation was a major factor behind the agricultural productivity of the communities of the Mixteca Alta, and indeed of all Mesoamerica.

Terracing was another agricultural technique known and applied by farmers in order to eke as much food as possible from steeply sloping and broken terrain. Aimed at preventing erosion and the free runoff of rainwater, terraces were basically retention devices constructed either of stone or agave hedges which, once laid along the contour of a hillside, held back the soil and reduced the angle of the slope.

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[57] Sanders and Price, op. cit., p. 149. Irrigation and its social, economic and political implications are also discussed in Wolf, op. cit., pp. 76-78.

[58] Indian and Mestizo farmers in the Valley of Oaxaca to this day still practise riego a brazo. In pre-Hispanic times, the areas watered by this system of irrigation were located predominantly where the water table lay near the surface of the valley floor. Riego a brazo entailed the digging of several shallow wells in areas under cultivation, water being drawn in pots and poured at the bottom of various plants growing around the wells. Tapping the water supply which lay one to three metres below ground level, this method of manual irrigation enabled communities in the Valley of Oaxaca to frequently reap two or three harvests a year. Riego a brazo was thus an extremely intensive and productive system and contributed much to the creation of a food surplus in the Zapotec state. A similar system of irrigation was carried out in the Valley of Teotihuacan. See Flannery, et al., op. cit., pp. 450-451, and Sanders and Price, op. cit., p. 148.

As a method of soil conservation, terracing was an effective and worthwhile practice of particular utility in deeply dissected upper slopes.

The technique of lama-bordo terracing was extensively employed in the Mixteca Alta and was a decisive factor in supporting the dense population of the region during late pre-Hispanic times. Lama-bordo terracing involved the construction of stone and rubble dykes across stream beds during the period of heavy summer runoff in order to trap water and eroding soils as they moved from upper slopes down towards the valley floors. Dykes varied between one to four metres in height and ten to two hundred metres in length and created plots of cultivable land ranging from a few hundred square feet to ten hectares.[59] The lama-bordo system is still used today, for in two or three years there is a sufficient accumulation of soil behind dykes to support a milpa. (See Plate 4.)

In the Valley of Nochixtlán fertile black or dark-brown soils overlie a layer of tepetate which in turn rests upon the red clays of the Yanhuitlán deposits. Once the black or dark-brown soils from the upper slopes had been removed through utilisation or erosion, the lama-bordo terrace system could be maintained only by cutting down through the tepetate layer to the fertile clays of the Yanhuitlán beds, so that they would wash down and accumulate behind the dykes. The implications of this procedure are outlined by Ronald Spores:

> Once an initial experiment or accident of this sort had occurred, the predictable sequence must have been clear to every farmer in the Valley. Gullying cut back the red Yanhuitlán beds, progressively undercutting the caliche layer upslope. Below the gullied area, farmers

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[59] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 563.

Plate 4 Lama-bordo terrace supporting a crop of maize near Yanhuitlán.

could trap and farm the red soil which was washing down and create new farmland. Level and well-watered farm plots could thereby be produced in areas that had previously been considered unsuitable for agriculture, and local productivity was substantially increased.

The conclusion which must be drawn is that the disasterous erosion so apparent in the Nochixtlán Valley today was not simply the result of deforestation, intemperate grazing, or agriculture that followed the Spanish Conquest, but that it was in large part intentionally induced and encouraged by pre-Hispanic Mixtec farmers who wanted to expand and improve the lama-bordo terrace system.[60]

An important commercial product of the lands of the Mixteca Alta was the dyestuff cochineal, derived from the dried bodies of the tiny insect Coccus cacti which bred on the leaves and joints of the nopal cactus (Optunia coccenellifera). The collection of mature insects was a slow, laborious task as the insects were of miniscule size and some 25,000 needed to be gathered to make a single pound.[61] After drying, grana was formed, a dyestuff which was highly valued by the Indians of all Mesoamerica.

Cochineal was used extensively in inter-regional trade and was employed by Mixtec craftsmen to colour various textiles, woods, and stone; artists also used the dye to obtain brilliant purple, scarlet and crimson hues.[62] The tribute records of the Culhua Mexica attest to the significance of grana in the region, both Coixtlahuaca and Tlaxiaco providing the dyestuff as part of their tributary levy to Tenochtitlán.[63] The community of Nochixtlán was famous for its grana output and it was for the production of cochineal that the community derived its name.[64]

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[60] Spores, "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 563.

[61] R. L. Lee, "Cochineal Production and Trade in New Spain to 1600," The Americas, Vol. IV, (1948), p. 451.

[62] Cochineal appears to have enjoyed multiple usage in highland Mesoamerica. Apart from the above-mentioned uses, it was utilised by women as a cosmetic with which to paint their hands, breasts, and necks, and when made into a lotion with burnt incense was applied as a beautifying agent on their faces. Prostitutes are reputed to have been in the habit of staining their teeth a lurid cochineal red. See Lee, op. cit., p. 453.

Politics, Trade and Population

In the early sixteenth century the people of the Mixteca Alta were organised politically into many small kingdoms, each of which was controlled by powerful ruling lineages which, in every sense, dominated the social and economic as well as the political life of the Mixteca Alta.[65] Within each kindgom were a number of communities, ranging in size from two or three hundred to several thousand inhabitants, with only a few of the bigger communities such as Tlaxiaco,[66] Teposcolula,[67] Coixtlahuaca,[68] and Yanhuitlán suporting populations of around ten thousands.[69] Each kingdom, therefore, consisted of a larger ceremonial and administrative centre, the cabecera, around which were scattered a myriad of lower-order settlements of dependent status. Population, consequently, was dispersed throughout the territory of each kingdom, and tended not to agglomerate massively in one particular location. With this type of population distribution no single settlement could be perceived as being a truly urban entity such as Teotihuacan, Tenochtitlán, or Monte Albán; rather, the kingdoms of the Mixteca Alta resembled in size, character, and morphology the "city-states" of ancient Greece or Italy.[70]

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[63] R. H. Barlow, The Extent of the Empire of the Culhua Mexica, Ibero-Americana: 28, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), pp. 112-118.

[64] Nochixtlán is Nahuatl for "place of cochineal" (Nahuatl nochixtli [cochineal] and tlán [the place of]). See Cayetano Esteva, op. cit., p. 244. The Mixteco name for Nochixtlán is Atoco which means "at the place of the nopal cactus". See Smith, op. cit., p. 81.

[65] B. Dahlgren de Jordan, La Mixteca - Su Cultura E Historia Pre-Hispánica, (Mexíco, 1966), pp. 127-161.

[66] Tlaxiaco is a corruption of the Nahuatl Tlachquiauco which means "place of the ball court outside of the town". The Mixteco name for Tlaxiaco is Naisi Nuu which is best translated as "clearly seen" or "the good view". For further discussion, see Smith, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

[67] Teposcolula is referred to in Mixteco as Yucu Ndaa which means "hill of the maguey cactus". See Smith, op. cit., p. 40.

[68] Coixtlahuaca is Nahuatl for "plain of the serpent". Its Mixteco name Yodzo Coo, means exactly the same. See Smith, op. cit., p. 65.

Although they shared many cultural attributes such as language, religion and a belief in legends which told of a common origin, Mixtec kingdoms remained politically independent of each other. Alliances and treaties were forged from time to time, particularly if two or more kingdoms were threatened by the same external aggressor, but most were short-lived. Indeed, neighbouring kingdoms were just as likely to be waging war upon each other than to be in a state of truce or alliance.[71] It was in this most important political sense that the Mixtec differed from the Zapotec of the Valley of Oaxaca; the Zapotec communities had a long tradition of political unity never attained by their Mixtec counterparts.[72]

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[69] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 101.

[70] This analogy is discussed in some detail in Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 11. The thesis which holds that although the Mixtec people achieved a high level of cultural development in many fields of the arts and science, they did not attain an advanced form of urban life is a contention of Ronald Spores. See Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 8 and Chapter IV, and "Nochixtlán," op. cit., p. 568.

[71] Caso, "The Mixtec and Zapotec Cultures," op. cit., p. 22. An interesting discussion of warfare in the Mixteca during pre-colonial times is contained in Dahlgren, op. cit., pp. 163-189.

Mixtec kingdoms developed principally in valley pockets and gained hegemony over lands in close proximity.[73] Entire valleys constituted the kingdoms of Tlaxiaco, Achuitla, Teposcolula, and Teozacoalco,[74] with some control being exercised over neighbouring valleys. Other kingdoms shared valleys. In this way the Valley of Nochixtlán, the largest in the entire Mixteca Alta, was divided between the prosperous kingdom of Yanhuitlán and the less-influential kingdom of Nochixtlán, with the former having control over most of the land in the valley floor, while the latter held the more broken foothill country to the north and east.[75] Similarly, the long, sinuous, fertile valley of Tamazulapan was divided between the kingdom of Tamazulapan, which controlled the northern end, and the kingdom of Tejupan,[76] which exerted control over the southern end.

At the time of the Spanish Conquest in the early 1520s, most of the kingdoms of the Mixteca Alta were part of the great tributary empire of the Culhua Mexica. The lords and wealthy merchants of

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[72] Caso, "The Mixtec and Zapotec Cultures," *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[73] Cook and Borah, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[74] *Teozacoalco* is referred to in Mixteco as *Chiyo Ca'nu*, which means "large platform". See Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[75] Cook and Borah, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[76] The Mixteco name for *Tejupan* is *Ñuu Ndaa*, which means "blue town". See Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Tenochtitlán, the lake-bound stronghold of the Mexica,[77] had long looked on the prosperous Mixtec kingdoms with the intent of one day incorporating them into the great empire. The first major Mexica offensive was against the Mixtec kingdom of Tlaxiaco, which fell to the forces of Tenochtitlán in 1455.[78] After this successful military venture, the Mexica then turned to the richest market kingdom of the Mixteca Alta - Coixtlahuaca.

The economic prosperity of Coixtlahuaca was rooted in its function as a highland entrepôt for the lands of the Papaloapan River to the east. Over the mountains from the countryside watered by the mighty Papaloapan came gold, quetzal feathers, belts, rubber balls, and cacao, the beans of which were used to prepare a beverage drunk by the nobility, *chocolatl*, and which also served as a medium of exchange.[79] The *cacique* of Coixtlahuaca in the mid-fifteenth century was Atonal, who had traditionally permitted Mexica merchant caravans unhindered passage through his kingdom *en route* to Tenochtitlán. With the fall of Tlaxiaco, the suspicious Atonal believed the caravans to be reconaissance expeditions sent out by the Mexica as a prelude to a military offensive, and the Mixtec ruler responded by ordering the massacre of all such mercantile groups located within his territory. Once the news of

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[77] Tenochtitlán is Nahuatl for "place of the *tenochtli* cactus". This grand city was referred to by the Mixtec as *Ñuu Co'yo* which means "the town of the marsh grass". See B. C. Brundage, *A Rain of Darts - The Mexica Aztecs*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 33-34, and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[78] Brundage, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[79] Brundage, *op. cit.*, p. 150. On the uses of cacao by the people of Mesoamerica see J. F. Bergmann, "The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation in Pre-Columbian America," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 59, (1969), pp. 85-96.

Atonal's actions reached Tenochtitlán, an enraged Moctezuma immediately declared war.[80]

The first attack of the Mexica on Coixtlahuaca ended in their resounding defeat, something of a new experience to a people who believed themselves to be invincible. After a two year recess during which forces were reorganised and new strategies devised, Moctezuma mounted another offensive, a massive army being assembled for the second campaign. The Mexica had already suffered their first defeat at the hands of Atonal's forces and were determined to re-assert their invincibility and regain lost prestige. For the second encounter, Coixtlahuaca received military assistance from the powerful city-states of Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco, but the onslaught of the Mexica was so great that even this support could not hold back Moctezuma's advancing army. Coixtlahuaca fell in 1458, the brave Atonal was assassinated, and the Mexica moved in to take control of the trade and commerce passing through this rich and fruitful highland territory.

The fall of Coixtlahuaca, which Robert Barlow has described as "one of the great events of the fifteenth century",[81] opened the way for the expansion of the Empire of the Culhua Mexica into the lands of the Gulf Coast. When word of Atonal's defeat reached the communities of the Papaloapan east of Coixtlahuaca, they sent forth dignitaries to pay homage to Moctezuma and to render themselves tributary to Tenochtitlán. One such community was Tochtepec, which soon developed into one of the most active markets of the entire Mexica Empire. Under

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[80] Dahlgren, op. cit., p. 59.

[81] Barlow, op. cit., p. 114.

Mexica hegemony, Coixtlahuaca functioned as a commercial intermediary, passing on the products of Tochtepec and the East to the lords and priests of the Valley of Mexico.[82] One of Moctezuma's successors, Tizoc, who ruled Tenochtitlán from 1481 until 1486, was responsible for further extending Mexica tributary jurisdiction over the Mixteca Alta by rendering the kingdom of Yanhuitlán subservient after much Mixtec resistance.[83]

The pattern of Mexica domination, however, was by no means continuously effective or unhampered, but was rather broken and interrupted. In the course of their drive towards establishing a vast tributary empire, the Mexica suffered periodic setbacks through numerous Mixtec uprisings and rebellions; both Coixtlahuaca and Yanhuitlán, for example, had to be reconquered after a successful counter-offensive had temporarily removed the tributary yoke of the Mexica.[84] Even Tlaxiaco, which supported a sizeable Mexica garrison, mounted troublesome insurrections. The most complete subjugation of the Mixteca Alta was accomplished by Moctezuma the Younger, who ruled Tenochtitlán from 1503 to 1520,[85] and who ordered military campaigns to be waged in the region from 1504 to 1512. After this series of campaigns the Mexica held not only the Mixteca Alta, but also much of the Mixteca Baja as well as the Valley of Oaxaca.[86] The Mixtec kingdoms of Tututepec,[87] Putla,[88] and Zacatepec[89] in the Mixteca de la Costa, however, successfully resisted the encroachment of the Mexica, and yielded only to the Spaniards.[90]

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[82] Brundage, op. cit., p. 151.

[83] Dahlgren, op. cit., p. 61.

[84] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 19.

[85] Brundage, op. cit., p. 337.

[86] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 19.

The Mexica organised the Mixteca Alta into two tributary provinces centred around Tlaxiaco and Coixtlahuaca, both of which are listed in the imperial tribute records of the Matricula de Tributos and the Codex Mendocino.[91] Tlaxiaco administered the southern parts of the Mixteca Alta and had two subsidiary tribute collecting centres at Achuitla and Zapotlán. This province sent yearly to Tenochtitlán twenty vessels of gold dust, five sacks of cochineal, four hundred bunches of quetzal feathers, one warrior's costume and shield, and eight hundred large mantles, the last-mentioned being dispatched in two half-yearly shipments of four hundred.[92]

Coixtlahuaca was the larger of the two provinces and administered the northern parts of the Mixteca Alta. A densely-settled and resourceful province, Coixtlahuaca had eleven subsidiary tribute collecting centres, at Cuasimulco, Cocolan, Cuicatlán, Mitlatongo, Nochixtlán, Tamazola, Tamazulapan, Teposcolula, Tejupan, Xaltepec, and Yanhuitlán. The tribute of this province is listed below.

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[87] Tututepec is Nahuatl for "hill of the bird". Its Mixteco name, Yucu Dzaa, means exactly the same. See Smith, op. cit., p. 38.

[88] The name Putla is derived from the Nahuatl pochtlán which means "place of smoke" or "place of mists". Its Mixteco name, Ñu Ñuma, also has this meaning. See Smith, op. cit., p. 97, and Cayetano Esteva, op. cit., p. 293.

[89] Zacatepec is Nahuatl for "hill of the zacate plant". Zacate is a grass-like plant used primarily as fodder for animals. See Smith, op. cit., p. 96.

[90] Barlow, op. cit., p. 113, and Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 20.

[91] The Matricula de Tributos was the ledger kept by the Culhua Mexica to record the amount of tribute paid by the various provinces under their administration. The Codex Mendocino is a copy of the original tribute list made in the 1540s under the orders of Viceroy Mendoza, after whom the copy was named. See Barlow, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

[92] Barlow, op. cit., p. 113.

YEARLY SHIPMENTS

2 warriors' costumes together with shields
2 strings of chalchiuites
800 bunches of quetzal feathers
1 royal emblem called tlapiloni
40 sacks of cochineal
20 bowls of gold dust

HALF-YEARLY SHIPMENTS

400 bundles of quilted mantles, richly decorated
400 bundles of mantles, striped red and white
400 bundles of black-and-white mantles
400 bundles of loincloths
400 bundles of women's blouses and skirts[93]

In addition to the above payments, the conquered communities were also required to support Mexica garrisons and numerous officials and administrators. Although the Mexica replaced some Mixtec lords with others of Mexica origin or allegiance, the internal administration and government of the Mixtec kingdoms was not disrupted. Under the tributary jurisdiction of Tenochtitlán, conquered kingdoms retained their traditional boundaries, ruling lineages, customs, and institutions. In the words of Ronald Spores:

> Despite the Mexican overlordship, virtual local autonomy continued in the major centres of the Mixteca Alta. The Mexicans were interested more in acquiring tribute than in physical domination or acquisition of land. The desired end could best be obtained by maintaining

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[93] Barlow, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

> traditional lines of authority, and there seems to have been little effort on the part of the Mexicans to upset traditional local patterns.[94]

The campaigns waged against the Mexica, in conjunction with the frequent battles fought between rival kingdoms, resulted in periodic fluctuations in the size of the population of the Mixteca Alta. As well as those killed outright in battle, numerous Mixtec warriors would be rounded up after a Mexica victory and sent to Tenochtitlán to meet their death upon the sacrificial altar. For example, one thousand captives were taken back to Tenochtitlán for sacrifice to the sun god following the uprising of Tlaxiaco in 1506.[95] However, the impact of warfare on the population was made less severe by the practice of polygamy, which ensured that females left without male partners killed either in battle or sacrificed ceremoniously continued to reproduce.[96] Therefore, despite the ravages of warfare and Mexica ceremonial customs, the Mixteca Alta at the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century was still densely settled, supporting a population estimated by Cook and Borah of between 600,000 to 800,000.[97] Moreover, the pattern of life under the tributary control of the lords of Tenochtitlán was in no major way unlike that experienced under the Mixtec kings. It was not until after the arrival of the Spanish colonial regime that events occurred which boldly ushered in a new era and precipitated a traumatic reorganisation of aboriginal life.

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[94] Spores, "Spanish Contact," op. cit., p. 980

[95] S. F. Cook, "Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Colonial Mexico," in J. A. Graham (ed.), Ancient Mesoamerica - Selected Readings, (Berkeley: Peek Publications, 1966), p. 290. The Mexica believed that each night the sun waged war against the stars in defence of the existing order of the universe. Prisoners of war were sacrificed in order to supply the sun with energy to prolong its struggle. If sacrifices were not offered, the Mexica believed the sun would succumb to the forces of night and evil and that the universe would fall asunder. The Mexica lived in constant fear of this cataclysm. See Wolf, op. cit., p. 130.

[96] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 21.

[97] Cook and Borah, op. cit., p. 21.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD

> Time and the bell have buried the day,
> The black cloud carries the sun away.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

The Hispanic Dream

The Spaniards who sailed across the Atlantic to a new life in America were drawn from all walks of life. Doubtless they were highly individual in certain respects, insofar as every human being has personal characteristics which can be considered unique. However, in coming to the New World the first Spaniards were united in sharing a number of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions which, initially, bound them together more than differences and disagreements rendered them apart.

Three broad groups of men comprised the mainstay of the early colonial regime. Firstly, there were those who came in search of riches and fortune, particularly gold and silver, with which they sought to become wealthy and to return to Spain to lead the privileged life of an aristocrat. This desire is embodied in one of Hernando Cortés' most famous statements, "the Spaniards are troubled with a disease of the heart for which gold is the specific remedy".[1] Secondly, there were those whose objective was to serve the King of Spain by exercising control over communities of native people in the King's name, in much the same way as a member of the nobility in Spain ruled over vassals on his feudal estate. Thirdly, there were those who aspired chiefly to serve God by saving the souls of pagan Indians and by spreading the Gospel in an attempt to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth.[2]

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[1] Cited in A. G. Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 310. Cortés is reputed to have said this to the first member of the Mexica with whom he conversed. Columbus himself shared similar sentiments, declaring that "the best thing in the world is gold - it can even send souls to heaven". The Church, also, was affected by a passion for precious metals, the Franciscan Order stating categorically that "where there is no silver, religion does not enter". These statements appear alongside that of Cortés on p. 310 of Frank's interesting collection of essays.

Corporately, these three groups of men were responsible for the introduction of the "Spanish way of life" into America, a way of life with a tightly circumscribed system of values and attitudes which differed in many fundamental aspects from that led by the native peoples of America. According to George Foster, the "Spanish way of life"

> ... was manifest in the character, personality, personal habits, and beliefs of the first conquistadors and later settlers who went to America. It was manifest, perhaps even more sharply, in a philosophy about God, sovereign, State, and man which was remarkable as much for its effectiveness as a guide to action as for its internal consistency and completeness. This philosophy was instrumental in producing a colonial policy which has as its goal the spiritual and legal conquest of the native peoples of America, the suppression or modification of large parts of their indigenous cultures, and the replacement of aboriginal ways with those characteristics of Spanish culture believed by Church and State to be the most advanced and desirable forms of Spanish life and thought.[3]

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[2] It must be remembered that the discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 was contemporaneous with the Fall of Granada, the last campaign of the Reconquista and the final defeat of the Moors at the hands of the Christian Crusaders. At the time of the discovery of America, therefore, there prevailed in the now completely Christian Spain a crusade psychology which had been vital to the emerging state for slightly over seven hundred years. It was natural, then, that the conquest and colonisation of the New World should be conceived in terms of a crusade, as a religious as well as military campaign to save the souls of Indian infidels who, in a land of spiritual darkness and isolation, had not heard the Word of God.

[3] G. M. Foster, "Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage," Viking Fund Publication in Anthropology, No. 27, New York, (1960), p. 2.

The Spanish Conquest was based essentially on a system of ideals, ideals rooted in a firm belief in Christianity, legalism, order, and the noble life. This ideology held that the Indians of the New World were to hear the Word of God, passed on to them through the work of the Catholic Church, served by the priests of Spain. Gold and silver, in addition to being shipped overseas, were to be employed in the founding of churches and towns; newly established towns were to be laid out in accordance with a preconceived plan, were to have a regular, grid-iron morphology, and were to be clean, spacious, and uncrowded. The churches of the planned settlements were to be sumptuously decorated and of elegant and graceful construction. In return for spiritual leadership, the Indians would labour on the land and provide their Spanish overlords with goods and services. A Spaniard, as a lord of the land, would see to it that Indians entrusted to his care and attention would be taught the scriptures and would be adequately fed, clothed, and housed, with each Indian _bohío_, or family dwelling house, having a garden plot sufficient to maintain the members of a household. Such ideals, and many others, were fostered by sixteenth century Spaniards, and indeed were often explicitly incorporated into colonial legislation concerning exactly how the land and people of the New World should be governed.[4] However, although to some degree the ideals materialised, the Utopia which they were to collectively bring into being remained elusive. In the course of the sixteenth century internal feuds and dislocations, disrespect, corruption, and blatant non-implementation or recognition of certain laws, conflict between ecclesiastical and secular interests, distance from the direct authority of the Spanish court, and a declining Indian population all served to frustrate the ambitions of imperial Spain. Between the vision and the reality the Hispanic dream faltered, decayed, and eventually perished, leaving only the ideals which generated it to live on afterwards as testimony to what might have been.

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[4] Perhaps the best example of this type of legislation are the Laws of Burgos, drawn up in 1512 and outlining, in thirty-five articles, fundamental procedures of government and legislation for Spanish colonies in the New World. See L. B. Simpson, _The Encomienda in New Spain_, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 29-38.

The First Military Entradas and Initial Hispanic Impressions of the Mixteca

The first Spanish entrada of the Mixteca Alta was undertaken in 1520, when Gonzalo de Umbría and a small party of Spaniards passed through the northern parts of the region. This band of men apparently encountered no native resistance, and indeed the rich and populous kingdom of Coixtlahuaca sent envoys to Cortés in September of 1520 offering the peaceful surrender of their province.[5] A second entrada in 1521 under the leadership of Francisco de Orozco pushed into the southern parts of the Mixteca Alta, to be met with some resistance by a Mexica-Mixtec alliance at Itzcuintepec, about 35 miles southeast of Nochixtlán.[6] In the spring of 1522 a third entrada led by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado crossed the Mixteca Alta en route to the Mixteca de la Costa, where the Spaniards encountered strong native resistance from the powerful kingdom of Tututepec.[7] Although discontent was manifest in periodic uprisings which rippled through Indian communities in the early 1520s, by about the middle of the decade the Spaniards excercised effective military control over all parts of the Mixteca. Moreover, although some Mixtec kingdoms forcefully resisted the Spanish occupation of their land, military conquest by the colonial regime was achieved without the violence and bloodletting that accompanied the subjugation of the native peoples of Cholula or Tenochtitlán.

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[5] P. Gerhard, A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 285. The hostility of the Mixtec towards their Mexica overlords in this part of the Mixteca doubtless assisted the Spaniards in their attempt to win control over the region.

[6] Gerhard, op. cit., p. 200.

[7] Gerhard, op. cit., p. 380.

Possibly the first Spaniards to see the Mixteca were two soldiers selected by Cortés to accompany a pair of Indian guides ordered by Moctezuma to undertake a reconaissance of the provinces of the Mexica Empire with the principal objectives of showing the Spaniards those territories where gold was mined. The Spanish soldiers were shown one such mine at Sosola, a community situated on the southern margins of the Mixteca Alta. This mission was recorded in the second letter of Cortés to Emperor Charles V, sent to Madrid on the 30th of October, 1520:

> One party went to a province known as Cuzula (Sosola) eighty leagues from the capital (Tenochtitlán), whose natives are subject to Muteczuma, and there they were shown three rivers from all of which they brought me samples of gold of good quality, although obtained by very primitive apparatus similar to that used by other Indian tribes; on the way my men informed me they passed through three provinces, very fertile, with many towns, cities and other smaller centres, and with so many fine buildings that, so they said, there are not finer in all Spain. In particular they reported that they had seen a fortified garrison which is larger, stronger and better built than the castle of Burgos. The people, moreover, of one of these provinces, called Tamazulapa, were more fully clothed than others we have seen and as it appeared to them very intelligent.[8]

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[8] Taken from Five Letters of Cortés to the Emperor, translated and edited by J. B. Morris (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 78. The "fortified garrison" alluded to may have been one of the Mexica strongholds at Coixtlahuaca or Tlaxiaco.

Some fifteen years after Spanish domination of the Mixteca, a favourable impression of the land and resources of the region was recorded by the Franciscan friar Toribio Motolinía, a diligent, perceptive, and widely-travelled priest writing in the first years of the 1540s:

> In this land of Mixteca there are many provinces and towns, and though it is very mountainous it is all settled. It forms some valleys and plains, but there is no plain in the whole country more than one league wide. It is a thickly settled territory and rich, with mines of gold and silver .... It is a healthy country, all the towns are high and in dry places, and the climate is temperate ....[9]

Another man of the cloth who had a favourable impression of the Mixteca was the Bishop of Oaxaca, Fray Bernardo de Albuquerque. Although writing around 1570, fifty years after the first entrada, the Bishop's comments are interesting and worthy of mention:

> The province of the Misteca ... is a land with a good climate, and rich in maize; it produces wheat very well, and all the fruits of Spain and of this land. There is plenty of water, good lumber, firewood, stone, and lime .... The [Mixtec] province of the South Sea, [the Mixteca de la Costa], is good land, and the Mixteca Baja ... is also good, [but] the [Mixteca] Alta is better.[10]

In Spanish eyes, therefore, the Mixteca in general and the Mixteca Alta in particular were viewed as rich and resourceful provinces, supporting a considerable number of populous Indian communities and having fertile, well-watered valleys of great agricultural potential. Moreover, although an upland region, the Mixteca Alta had an agreeable climate to which the incoming Spaniards had no great difficulty in adjusting. A major feature of the region was its gold and silver deposits, which attracted the Spaniards at an early stage to this part of the land they called New Spain. The Mixteca Alta, by 1525, was under firm Spanish domination and was about to enter a new era. Initial reconnaissances and inventories by eager Spanish eyes having established the existence of substantial human and physical resources, the stage was now set for an intensive, systematic exploitation of the region by imperial Spain.

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[9] Fray Toribio Motolinía, A History of the Indians of New Spain, translated by Elizabeth Andros Foster, (Berkeley: The Cortes Society, 1950), p. 30.

[10] Cited in J. Paddock, Ancient Oaxaca - Discoveries in Mexican Archaeology and History, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 369.

Land and Settlement

Towards the end of the fifteenth century Spain, for over six centuries a mosaic of feudal principalities, was on the threshold of becoming an integrated capitalistic society, by virtue of the growth of industry and trade controlled and organised by town-based entrepreneurs.[11] The *Reconquista* fully completed with the fall of Granada in 1492, there seemed little need to maintain traditional feudal relationships in which a lord exercised economic, legal, and social control over a number of vassals; Spain seemed prepared, in other words, to embark like the rest of Western Europe on a new course of economic development based upon capital investment in industry. Moreover, economic change would be accompanied by social change which would erode the power and authority of the aristocracy. However, with the discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492, waning feudal mentalities in Spain were recharged, as Columbus' voyage opened up the possibility of every aspiring Spaniard one day becoming a lord of this newly-found land, its inhabitants, and its gold. In the words of Eric Wolf, "the year 1492 might have marked Spain's awakening to a new reality; instead, it marked the coming of a new dream, a new utopia".[12]

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[11] E. R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 157-159.

The Spaniards who came to the New World were thus drawn from a feudal-based but emerging capitalist social system, with the balance weighing in favour of traditional feudal-medieval attitudes as opposed to more revolutionary capitalist-Renaissance ones. Just as in Spain, where society was traditionally divided into lords and vassals, masters and serfs, the military conquest and later socio-economic development of the New World was fashioned initially in a feudal form, although capitalist concepts were also incorporated into Spanish colonial rule. It was as a result of this blending of ideas, with feudal ways of thinking dominant, that there emerged in America a major feature of Spanish colonial administration - the encomienda system.

The encomienda system in the New World dates from 1499 A.D., when Columbus made the first grants of encomienda to numerous beneficiaries in the island of Española.[13] In essence, the encomienda was a means of granting privileges which permitted the recipient of an encomienda, an encomendero, to enjoy the labour and tributary services of a specified number of Indians. The encomienda system was not, in itself, a system of granting land to conquerors and colonists, but was rather a method of conferring favours and privileges upon certain individuals deemed worthy of the honour.[14]

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[12] Wolf, op. cit., p. 159.

[13] R. Spores, The Mixtec Kings and Their People, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), p. 75.

In New Spain during the 1520s the first grants of encomienda were awarded by Cortés, as acting governor of the colony, to members of the military in repayment for their effort and sacrifice in winning the Empire of the Culhua Mexica and adjacent regions for the Spanish Crown. Initial grants of encomienda placed no formal limitation on the amount of tribute exacted or labour drafted from Indian communities, resulting in widespread excesses on the part of encomenderos. In response to these crippling excesses, the Spanish colonial administration in the course of the sixteenth century formulated a series of laws which significantly amended the nature of the encomienda. For example, a cedula real (royal order) of 1549 decreed that the Indian labour draft be totally eliminated from the encomienda obligation, and by 1565 tribute in kind had been replaced by standard annual payments of one peso and half a fanega[15] of maize for each tributary unit.[16] The encomienda was thus a dynamic entity, the character, composition, and privileges of which were the subject of much heated debate and controversy within the colonial administration. As a well-recognised, generally accepted, extensively utilised but, unfortunately, seriously abused component of colonial legislation, the encomienda represented a good example of the tragic discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of Spanish colonial rule.

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[14] The word encomienda is derived from the Spanish verb encomendar, which translated literally means "to entrust". Encomenderos were therefore not landholders, per se, but rather trustees of specific Indian communities. The title of encomendero also carried with it certain obligations, such as supervising the initiation of the Indians into the Christian faith.

[15] A fanega is a unit of dry measure of about 1.5 bushels, or ca. 1.725 cubic inches. See W. B. Taylor, Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 260.

[16] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 77. A married Indian, a casado, together with his wife and family constituted a tributario, or one tributary unit.

Numerous grants of encomienda involving communities in the Mixteca Alta were awarded by Cortés and his successors to high-ranking members of the colonial regime. (See Figure 4 and Table 1.) One of the earliest encomiendas to be granted was that of Yanhuitlán, which Cortés awarded to his cousin and lieutenant, Francisco de las Casas, in 1523.[17] Although las Casas lost the title of encomendero of Yanhuitlán from 1529 to about 1535 through being absent in Spain, he regained the encomienda in 1537 following a series of legal proceedings with the viceregal government. In 1546 Francisco died, and the title of encomendero was passed on to his son, Gonzalo de las Casas. Gonzalo held the encomienda until his death in 1591, when his son, Francisco the Second, succeeded to the title. Thus, throughout the course of the sixteenth century the las Casas family was in a strong position to influence the pattern of life in Yanhuitlán.

In the early 1530s, when Yanhuitlán was temporarily administered by the Crown, tribute was assessed at 120 pesos in gold dust, oro en polvo, to be delivered every eighty days. Moreover, the Indians of the community were required to provide Spanish officials resident in

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[17] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 77. The granting by Cortés of what was one of the most prosperous and populous of all the former Mixtec kingdoms to a close relative was clearly an act of favouritism on his behalf. Las Casas also figured in Cortés' life as the bearer of King Charles V's letter naming Cortés governor of New Spain in 1523. See also Ross Parmenter, Week in Yanhuitlán, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), p. 14.

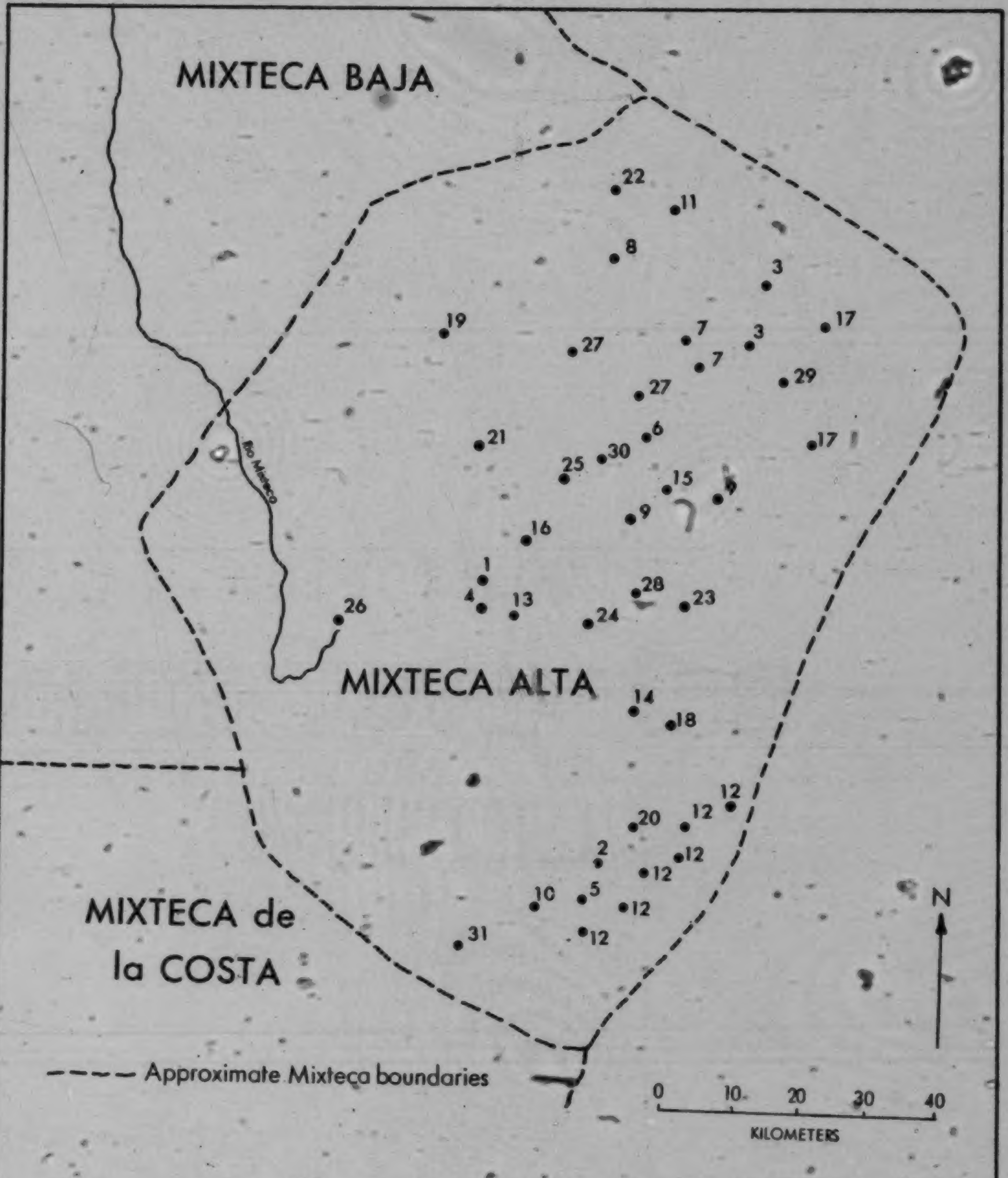

Figure 4- Known Encomiendas in the Mixteca Alta in the Early Sixteenth Century

Source - P. Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972. The name of the encomiendas and their respective encomenderos can be found by consulting the appropriate number in table I overpage.

TABLE I

KNOWN ENCOMIENDAS IN THE MIXTECA ALTA IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY

ENCOMIENDA	RECIPIENT (ENCOMENDERO)
1. Achiutla[1]	Francisco Maldonado
2. Amoltepec	-
3. Apuala and Xocoticapac	Gonzalo de Robles
4. Atoyaquillo	Juan Griego
5. Cenzontepec	Alonso Zimbrón de Vitoria
6. Chachuapa	Rufio de Benavides
7. Chicaguastepec and Iztactepec	Alonso de Morcillo
8. 1/2 of Coixtlahuaca[2]	Francisco de Verdugo
8. 1/2 of Coixtlahuaca	P. Díaz de Sotomayor
9. Etlatongo and Guautla	Juan de Valdivieso
10. Istayutla	Roman López
11. 1/2 of Ixcatlán	Rodrigo de Legura
11. 1/2 of Ixcatlán	García Velez
12. Los Peñoles[3]	Hernán Cortes
13. Malinaltepec	Hernán Martín
14. Mitlatongo	G. Ruíz de la Mota
15. Nochixtlán	Pedro de Maya
16. Palahuistlaguaca	Melchor de Alavés
17. Tanatepec and Tututepetongo	Juan Ochoa de Lexalde

Continued........

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[1] This *encomienda* also included the settlements of Atlatlauca, Atoyac-Yutucanu, Cuicuila, Chalcatongo, Mitla, Ocotepec, Tlatlaltepec and Yucucuy-Tlazoltepec.

[2] Prosperous and populous communities, such as Coixtlahuaca, were frequently shared between two *encomenderos*.

[3] This is the name given to a group of settlements including Iscuintepec, Estetla, Guaxolotipac, Huitepec, Totomachapa, and Zaaniza, which were claimed by Cortés as part of his Marquesado in the Valley of Oaxaca.

TABLE I (continued)

	ENCOMIENDA	RECIPIENT (ENCOMENDERO)
18.	1/2 of Tamazola	Juan de Valdivieso
18.	1/2 of Tamazola	Alonso de Contreras
19.	Tamazulapan	Juan Suárez
20.	1/2 of Teozacoalco	Juan Ochoa de Lexalde
20.	1/2 of Teozacoalco	Añton de Arriaga
21.	Teposcolula	Gonzalo de Alvarado
22.	Tequicistepec	Melchor de San Miguel
23.	Texotepec	Sebastian de Grejalva
24.	Tilantongo	Luís de Saavedra
25.	Tiltepec	Gerónimo de Salinas
26.	Tlaxiaco	Juan Nuñez Sedeño
27.	Tonaltepec and Zoyaltepec	Juan Astorga
28.	Xaltepec	Juan de la Torre
29.	Xaltepecongo	Gerónimo de Salinas
30.	Yanhuitlán	Francisco de las Casas
31.	Yolotepec	Alonso de Castellanos

Source: P. Gerhard, A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972. The encomiendas are numbered to correspond with their appropriate location on Figure 4.

Yanhuitlán with supplies of food.[18] In 1548, with the encomienda now firmly in the hands of the las Casas family, much more excessive demands were made upon the people and resources of Yanhuitlán, tribute and service being assessed as follows:

I. An annual payment of 782.5 pesos in gold dust. Each year the Indians were also required to cultivate and harvest for their encomendero a field planted with fifteen fanegas of maize.

II. Daily payments of four turkeys, two European hens, a small jar of honey, four hundred cacao beans, two cakes of beeswax, a bundle of sandlewood (tea), six hundred maize tortillas, thirty eggs, a half fanega of maize, one plate each of salt, chili, and tomatoes, ten loads (cargas) of firewood, and ten loads of fodder. The daily assessment also included the service of ten Indians in the pueblo.[19]

Sixteenth century tribute assessments also exist for the encomiendas of Nochixtlán, held by Pedro de Mayo, Teposcolula, held by Gonzalo de Alvarado, and Teozacoalco, shared between Juan Ochoa de Lexalde and Anton de Arriga. These are shown below.

I. Nochixtlan. Assessment of September 7, 1546: 40 pesos in gold dust every sixty days (240 pesos annually) "and no more".

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[18] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 78. In terms of the large population of Yanhuitlán in the early 1530s, Spores considers the tribute assessment for this period of time a "modest requirement".

[19] Taken from Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, Papeles de Neuva España, (Madrid: 1905-1906), Vol. I, p. 131, cited in Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 79. Increasing emphasis on the payment of gold may have been due to the decline in the size of the Indian population from the 1530s and a related fall in the labour supply. The population of Yanhuitlán in 1548 is recorded to have been comprised of 12,207 persons of age three years and above (Spores, p. 73). A carga, or load, was about as much as an individual Indian could carry on his back. See J. F. Bergmann, "The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation in Pre-Columbian America," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 59, No. 1, (1969), p. 87.

II. Teposcolula. Assessment of July 20, 1546: 50 pesos in gold dust every twenty days (900 pesos annually), the value of which is to be paid in cash (reales), plus a field of wheat of three fanegas to the planting.

III. Teozacoalco. Assessment of July 30, 1545: one peso in gold dust daily, plus small amounts of chili and beans.[20]

The encomienda system, with its probably fixed obligations of service and tribute, thus placed no small economic and social burden on the Indian communities of the Mixteca Alta, particularly after about 1540 when the aboriginal population of New Spain began its drastic decline due to virulent epidemics of Old World diseases ravaging the entire viceroyalty. In their own eyes, encomenderos were lords of the land, granted certain privileges by the Spanish Crown as repayment for their role in the Conquest, and acted in such a way as to extract as much as possible in terms of tribute and labour from their luckless Indian charges.

Existing alongside the Spanish encomienda during the sixteenth century were two Indian landholding entities, the cacicazgo, or large hereditary estates, and collectively-worked community land, both of which were features of the pre-colonial cultural landscape and which survived the Conquest, although, like all other Indian institutions, they were subject to change and modification under Spanish rule.

Cacicazgos were large estates controlled by hereditary Indian chieftans and their families. The retention by local Indian rulers, or caciques, of the privilege to receive tribute and labour services from their former subjects was a notable feature of the communities of the Mixteca Alta throughout the sixteenth century.

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[20] Paso y Troncoso, op. cit., cited in Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 79.

Although this pattern of continuity of pre-Conquest privilege is by no means exclusive to the Mixteca Alta,[21] it was not common in all parts of New Spain. In many areas, native ruling families lost completely the right to levy tribute and receive drafts of labour, consequently forfeiting their high status within Indian society; this was certainly the case, for example, in the Valley of Mexico, where the Mexica tlatoque relinquished much to Spanish territorial and social encroachments.[22]

Two principal factors were responsible for the caciques of the Mixteca Alta retaining control over land and labour, and maintaining a high social position during the sixteenth century; firstly, the power and authority they held within Mixtec society before the Conquest, and secondly, their rapidly being acculturated to the Spanish way of life and participating as minor officials in the Spanish colonial administration. The second factor was particularly crucial. Native ruling lineages were recognised by the Spaniards as being a source from which the rudiments of local government could be established. It was to this end that much effort was expended in the early years of the Conquest by missionaries intent on converting caciques and members of their families to Christianity, teaching them the Spanish tongue, and instilling upon them the system of ideals, attitudes, and perceptions that formed the basis of the Spanish way of life in America. After cultural indoctrination, caciques and their relatives were awarded such positions as gobernador (governor) or alguacil (police officer) in the cabildos (town councils) established by the Spaniards in communities throughout New Spain. Organised in this fashion, authority at the community level remained, to an important degree, where it had traditionally rested, namely, in the hands of the Indian nobility.[23]

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[21] In the Valley of Oaxaca, to the south and east of the Mixteca Alta, caciques retained substantial landholdings and enjoyed high social status for much of the colonial era. The survival of the cacicazgo and the high social prestige that accompanied it in this part of New Spain was due to the power of the caciques in pre-Conquest society and the important role they performed in the peaceful surrender of the Valley of Oaxaca to Spanish domination. See Taylor, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

[22] Taylor, op. cit., p. 36.

It was for their participation in the colonial administration of New Spain that caciques were granted special privileges pertaining to tribute and labour services. One such cacique was Don Domingo de Guzman, who served the Spanish Crown as gobernador of the community of Yanhuitlán around the middle of the sixteenth century:

> In the city of Mexico on October 26, 1548, the most illustrious Lord Don Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy and governor for His Majesty in this New Spain, assessed the food and services that the Indians of Yanhuitlán are obliged to give Don Domingo, gobernador of the said pueblo, because of his office and for the time he will possess it.
>
> Firstly, they are to give the said gobernador every day a turkey and ten male Indian servants and ten female Indian servants.
>
> Further, they are to provide every six months two xiquipiles[24] of cacao gordo. [32,000 cacao beans per annum]
>
> Further, they are to spin seven cargas of cotton every six months and weave it into mantas. [blankets]
>
> Further, they are to work a field of wheat of three

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[23] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 120.

[24] A xiquipil was the standard Indian measure of cacao beans in pre-Columbian and early colonial America. It was comprised of 8,000 units, or twenty zontles. See Bergmann, op. cit., p. 87.

> hundred brazas,[25] caring for it and harvesting the crop.
>
> Further, they are to work four fields of maize, two fields measuring four hundred brazas en cuadra, another of three hundred, and another of six hundred.
>
> And this is what they have to give, and nothing more, and he may not request or levy more under penalty of being deprived of the privilege and being punished.[26]

Just as the royal native lineages of the Mixteca Alta retained the institution of the cacicazgo under Spanish rule, so also did Indian commoners retain the right to work a tract of community land. Indian community land was supposedly protected by law from any Spanish encroachment, a cedula real of 1532 explicitly stating that "the Indians shall continue to possess their lands, both arable tracts and grazing lands, so that they do not lack what is necessary".[27]

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[25] A braza is a unit of measurement of approximately five and one-half feet, or two varas. See Taylor, op. cit., pp. 259-261.

[26] Taken from a sixteenth century manuscript in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, and cited in Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit. pp. 160-161. The privileges enjoyed by Don Domingo bear considerable resemblance, save for the absence of an annual payment of gold, to those enjoyed by the encomendero of Yanhuitlán. Once again, the burden that this levy of tribute for the cacique, together with the tribute levied under the encomienda system, constituted for the community of Yanhuitlán as a whole has to be appreciated within the context of a declining aboriginal population. The point is neatly summarised by Woodrow Borah: "The burden upon the general Indian population which support of nobles [caciques] and community activities represented, therefore, probably became proportionately heavier as the villages shrank in size. In consequence, the ability of the Indian villages to contribute to the support of the new European segment of the population introduced by the Conquest was reduced not only by the sharp curtailment in their production but by greater pressure from within Indian society itself upon the remaining output of food and services." (W. Borah, New Spain's Century of Depression, Ibero-Americana: 35, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951, p. 5.)

[27] Cited in Taylor, op. cit., p. 67.

Under a law passed in 1567, when the Marqués de Falces was the Viceroy of New Spain, all Indian communities were entitled to a fundo legal, or townsite, of five hundred varas, approximately four hundred and fifty yards, in each of the four cardinal directions from the edge of the town.[28] This community-owned land was divided among the members of the community and worked in a collective effort. Within this zone no other person, Indian, Spanish, or Mestizo, was permitted to own cultivated land. Ideally, each member of the community received a parcel of the fundo legal considered sufficient to support himself and his family from one year to the next.[29]

Both Spanish and Indian landholding entities, therefore, existed side by side in the Mixteca Alta during the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, little information at present exists concerning the breakdown and distribution of land between Spaniard and Indian. One interesting set of data, however, is a series of estimates made by Lesley Byrd Simpson in the 1950s for land in the Northern Mixteca[30] converted to new exploitation between about 1536 and 1620. This information is presented in Table II.

One of the most significant and recognisable modifications of

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[28] Taylor, op. cit., p. 68.

[29] Taylor, op. cit., p. 68.

[30] The area Simpson designates as the Northern Mixteca includes most parts of the Mixteca Alta and the Mixteca Baja, including the communities of Acatlán (in present day Puebla), Atlatuaca, Coixtlahuaca, Huajuapan, Jaltepec, Juxtlahuaca, Nanactepec, Tecomávaca, Tejupan, Teotitlán del Camino, Teposcolula, Tlaxiaco, Tilantongo, and Yanhuitlán. See L. B. Simpson, Exploitation of Land in Central Mexico in the Sixteenth Century, Ibero-Americana: 36, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), p. 65.

TABLE II

LAND AREAS IN THE NORTHERN MIXTECA CONVERTED TO NEW EXPLOITATION

(1536 - 1620)

	Cattle (square leagues[1])	Sheep (square leagues)	Agriculture (caballerías[2])	Flour Mills
Spanish Grants	37	35	204	5
Indian Grants	-	53	35	2

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[1] The Spanish league in the sixteenth century was a distance of around 2.6 miles.

[2] The caballería was a rectangular unit embracing about 105 acres.

Source: L. B. Simpson, Exploitation of Land in Central Mexico in the Sixteenth Century, Ibero-Americana, No. 36, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952, pp. 17 - 19.

the landscape of the Mixteca Alta and other parts of New Spain was made by the introduction of the concept of the grid-plan town, a concept which changed Mixtec communities from random configurations of dwelling houses and farmland into orderly, organised settlement units. The establishment of the grid-plan town serves as a good example of the desire of the Spanish colonial administration to create an ideal society in its American colonies. Towns in sixteenth century Spain were generally of haphazard morphology, characterised by narrow, twisting streets, lack of space, and very cramped living conditions; the necessity of defence had much to do with this piling-up of buildings into a tight, compact cluster.[31]

The New World, in Spanish eyes, would have no need of fortification, and settlements would therefore be laid out on a regular, rectangular grid around a central plaza, would be spacious and uncrowded, would have no restricting town walls, and, above all, would be pleasant, healthy, and civilised places in which to live. This image of the ideal form of settlement, based on classical Roman and Greek models, was imprinted on the landscape of the Mixteca Alta, with new, grid-plan towns being established and existing settlements realigned and reorganised to conform with the ideal Spanish image; sixteenth century town plans for the communities of Nochixtlán and Tejupan (Plates 5 and 6) exemplify this cultural imprint.

Another significant alteration of the indigenous Mixtec settlement pattern was the relocation of the place of worship from adjacent to a focus of population into the centre of the community.

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[31] Wolf, op. cit., p. 163.

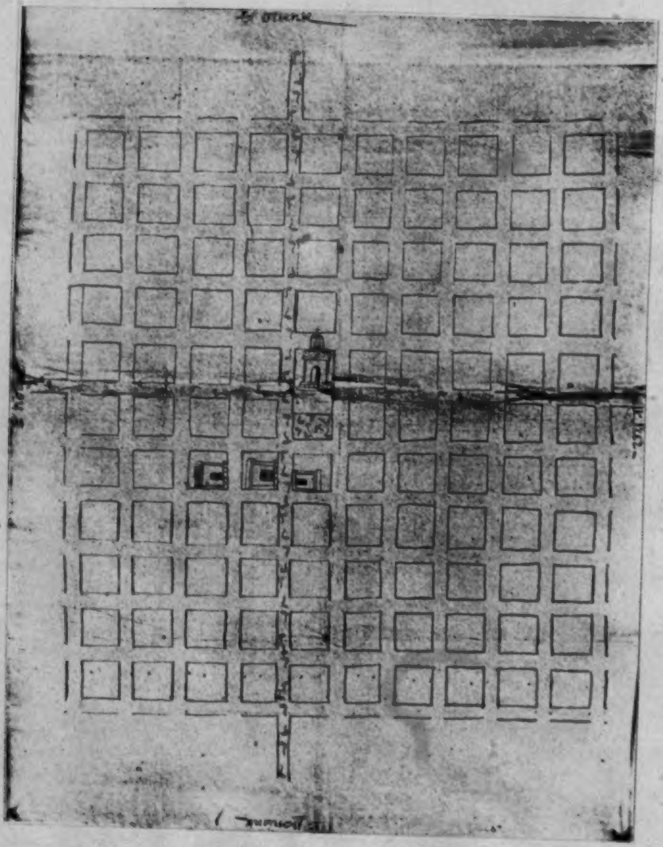

Plate 5 Spanish town plan of 1581 for the community of Nochixtlán.

Source George Kubler, Mexican Architecture in the Sixteenth Century, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 92. Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

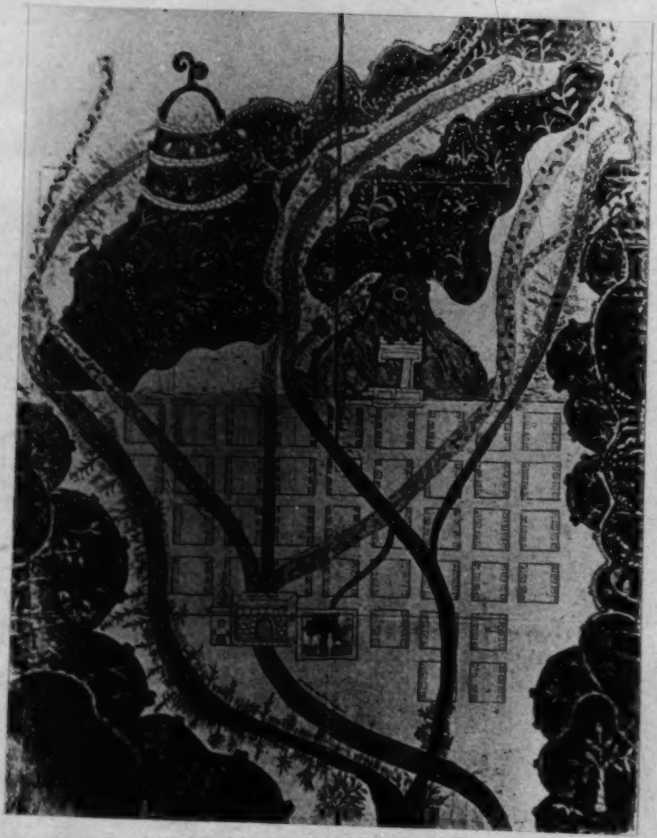

Plate 6 Spanish town plan of 1579 for the community of Tejupan.

Source George Kubler, Mexican Architecture in the Sixteenth Century, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 92. Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

The pre-Hispanic ceremonial complex on the perimeter of the cabecera was abandoned, and the new place of worship, the church, placed in the very heart of the community, frequently at one end of the zócalo, or central plaza (Plates 5 and 6). This symbolic location of the church at the centre of town, lying across the zócalo from the civic-administrative offices and situated adjacent to the market place, is a pattern recurrent in most towns of the Mixteca Alta (Plate 7).

Agriculture and Land Utilisation

The Spanish conquest of the Mixteca Alta, which brought about fundamental changes in the Mixtec way of life, was accompanied by an economic, agricultural and ecological revolution of equal intensity and consequence. Although adhering firmly to traditional methods of production and food staples, the communities of the Mixteca Alta in the years following the conquest were exposed to a host of new crops and new breeds of animals introduced by the Spaniards from the Old World. Moreover, Indian communities were swept by a more advanced agricultural technology, shown more refined systems of production, and subjected to a philosophy which perceived the land not as a source of sustenance but as an economic entity to be exploited for profit. In the hands of the Spanish colonial regime, the rural landscape underwent radical modification.

A major change in the agricultural activities of Mixtec communities was made by the introduction of Old World livestock. Prior to the conquest, the Indian agricultural economy conspicuously lacked animal domesticates and was significantly altered by the incursion of livestock. Animals introduced into the New World by the Spaniards fall

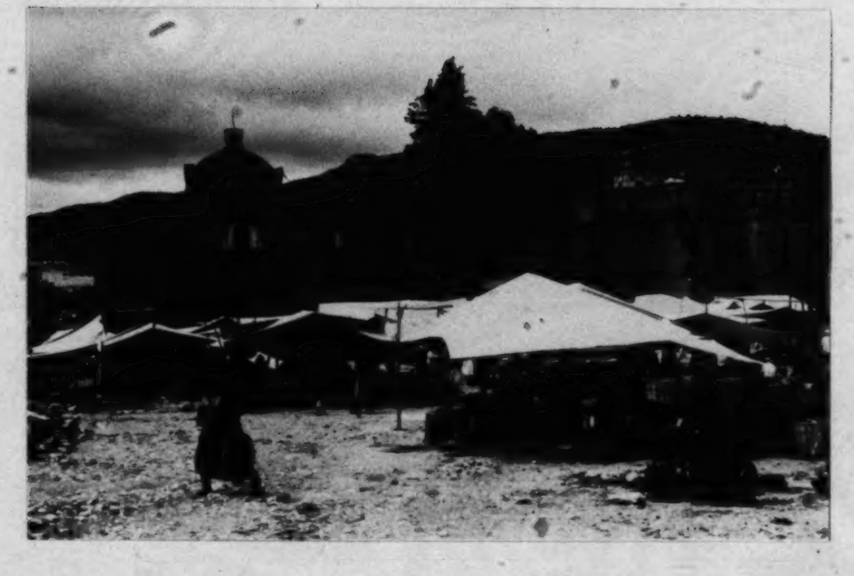

Plate 7 Church and market at Teposcolula.

into two broad categories, ganado mayor and ganado menor, the former being comprised of the larger domesticates, such as horses, mules, donkeys, cattle, and oxen, while the latter included the smaller domesticates, such as sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens.[32]

In the Mixteca Alta, the most prolific stock raised were ganado menor, especially sheep and goats, which adapted well to the cool highland climate. The raising of sheep and goats was both a Spanish and Indian occupation (see Table II), many Indian communities depending on this practice to make money for the annual levy of tribute and other community expenses.[33] Towards the end of the sixteenth century the Mixteca Alta supported forty-four registered flocks of sheep estimated at about two hundred thousand head, with grazing centred around the communities of Tejupan, Coixtlahuaca, Teposcolula, Tlaxiaco, Yanhuitlán, and Nochixtlán.[34]

During the sixteenth century sheep and goat raising had a drastic effect on the landscape of the Mixteca Alta. Owing to the steady decline in the size of the Indian population, land formerly cultivated on hill slopes was left unworked and subsequently utilised as pastureland. Uncontrolled grazing of sheep and goats on abandoned tracts of land resulted in chronic overgrazing which, in a region having a lengthy dry season and torrential summer rainfall, contributed greatly to the process of soil erosion. Sheep and goat raising was thus largely responsible for the acceleration of an erosional syndrome which has regretfully continued, unabated, to the present day, and which has permanently scarred the landscape of the Mixteca Alta. (Plate 1.)

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[32] R. C. West and J. P. Augelli, Middle America - Its Lands and People, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 286.

[33] Simpson, Exploitation, op. cit., p. 24. As well as paying tribute to encomenderos and civil authorities, the Indians were required to make contributions for the maintenance of hospitals and churches.

[34] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 83.

The Spaniards introduced many food crops into the New World, among the most important of which were wheat, barley, lentils, chick-peas, cabbages, carrots, turnips, pomegranates, apples, peaches, mangos, oranges, lemons and sugar cane.[35] In the Mixteca Alta the cultivation of wheat, the Spanish staff of life, was particularly significant, the cereal grain being well suited to the climate of the region and adapting well to the flat lands of the valleys of Tamazulapan, Teposcolula, and Yanhuitlán.[36] Although wheat was twice as costly to raise as maize and in fact gave much smaller yields, the Spaniards preferred the taste of their traditional staple to that of the Indians, and considered maize detrimental to the health of Europeans.[37] Spanish demand for wheat thus had much to do with its widespread cultivation in the Mixteca Alta; an important figure in first stimulating wheat production in the region was the first *encomendero* of Yanhuitlán, Francisco de las Casas.[38]

Associated with the cultivation of wheat was the use of the wooden plough, or ard, brought to the New World from the provinces of

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[35] West and Augelli, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

[36] Bishop Albuquerque in Paddock, *op. cit.*, p. 369, mentions the fine quality of Mixtec-grown wheat.

[37] Simpson, *Exploitation*, *op. cit.*, p. 24, and West and Augelli, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

[38] J. F. Iturribarría, *Ensayo Histórico Sobre La Industria De Seda En Oaxaca*, (Oaxaca: 1933), p. 27.

Andalusia and Extremadura in southern Spain.[39] With the plough and animal traction the Spaniards were able to work the heavier soils of the valley floors, which were generally more difficult to cultivate with only indigenous implements such as the digging stick or coa. Unfortunately, indiscriminate use of the plough on hill-slopes led to sheet and later gully erosion and only served to exacerbate the erosional sequences of highland regions such as the Mixteca Alta. The introduction and utilisation of the plough, therefore, must also be considered as a factor which contributed to the disasterous sequences of soil erosion responsible for the devastation of the hill slopes of the valleys of Coixtlahuaca, Tamazulapan, and Yanhuitlán.

As well as introducing new crops and new technological concepts, the Spaniards also commercialised and increased output of agricultural products important during the pre-Hispanic era. Such was the case of cochineal. The Mixteca Alta was the principal source of cochineal dye for the Culhua Mexica in the years immediately prior to the Spanish Conquest, the Codex Mendocino recording that forty-five bags of grana (dried cochineal) were paid yearly by the communities of the Mixteca Alta to Tenochtitlán.[40] Realising the potential of cochineal as a dyestuff in the markets of Europe, the Spaniards extended the amount of land in the Mixteca Alta devoted to the nopal cactus, encouraged communities to concentrate on the raising of the miniscule insect Coccus cacti, and eventually increased pre-conquest production of grana significantly.[41] Much of this increase was due to the work of the Dominican brothers Fray Domingo de Santa María and Fray Francisco Marín, who were jointly responsible for teaching the Indians the systematic cultivation of the nopal cactus and for improving the irrigation system of the region. Cochineal production benefited particularly from the latter innovation, the Mixteca Alta being a relatively dry country of scanty rainfall where water was always at a high premium.[42]

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[39] Foster, op. cit., p. 16 and p. 68.

[40] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 82.

The Mixteca Alta thus figured prominently in the cochineal venture of New Spain, production being centred around those communities important during pre-Hispanic times, with Malinaltepec, Nochixtlán, Tamazulapan, and Yanhuitlán being of particular significance during the colonial period.[43] (See Figure 5.) By the close of the sixteenth century some 250,000 to 300,000 pounds of grana, worth about 500,000 to 600,000 pesos, were exported each year from New Spain via Sevilla to the great cloth centres of Europe.[44] Cochineal, therefore, represented a substantial contribution to the economy of New Spain, and during the sixteenth century its commercial significance within the Mixteca Alta was surpassed by only one other enterprise - the raising of silk.

The origin of sericulture in the Mixteca Alta can be traced back to around 1531, when María de Aguilar, the wife of the encomendero

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[41] Gonzalo Gomez de Cervantes, La Vida Economica y Social de Nueva España al Finalizar el Siglo XVI, Mexico, 1944. Gomez de Cervantes wrote this account towards the end of the sixteenth century.

[42] R. Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, translated by L. B. Simpson, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 143-145.

[43] R. L. Lee, "Cochineal Production and Trade in New Spain to 1600," The Americas, Vol IV, (1948), pp. 449-473.

[44] Lee, op. cit., p. 472.

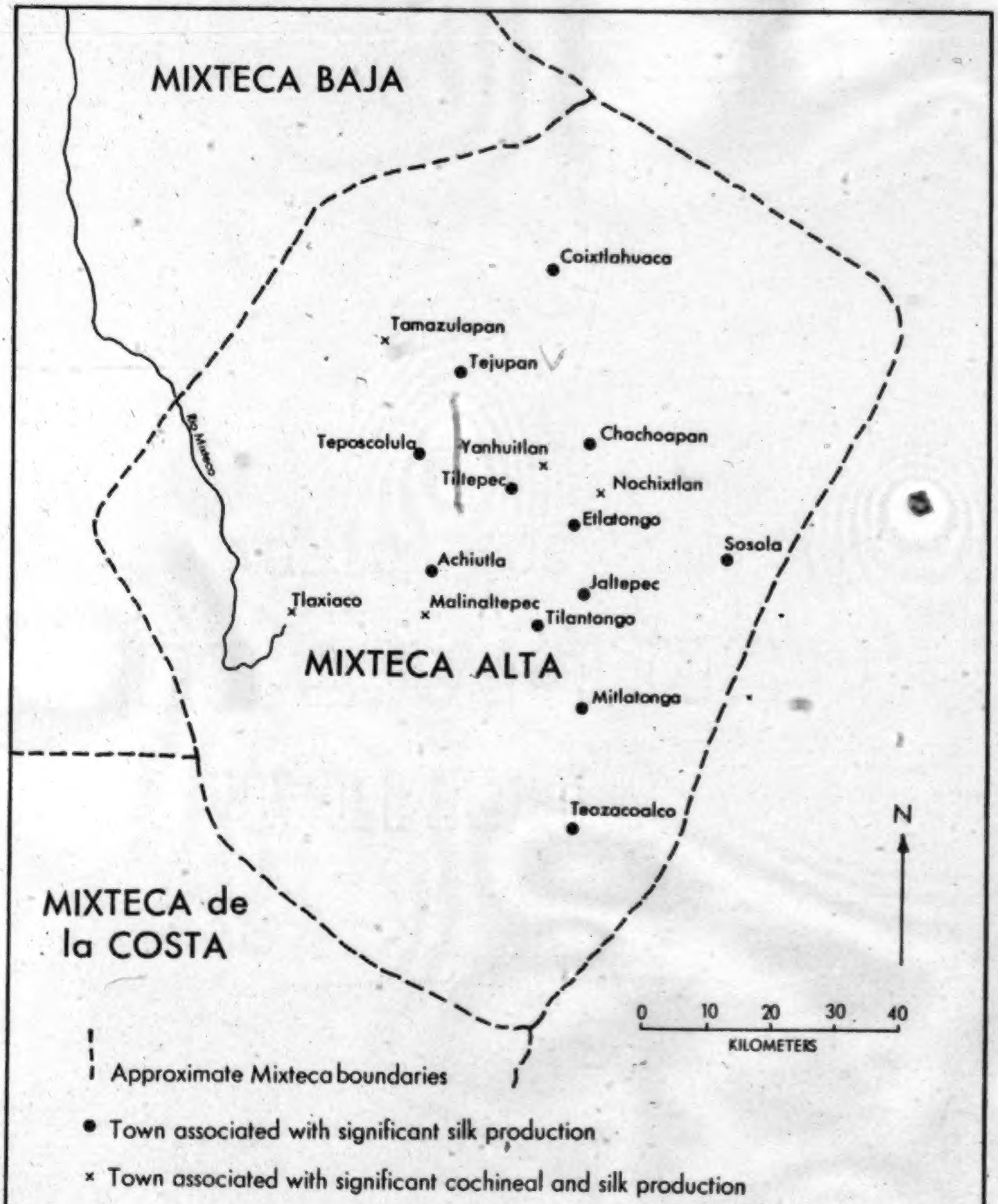

Figure 5- Principal Silk and Cochineal Centres in the Mixteca Alta During the Sixteenth Century

Source - W. Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico, Ibero-Americana No 20* Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1943 and R. L. Lee, *Cochineal Production and trade in New Spain to 1600, The Americas, Vol.IV,* 1948 of Yanhuitlán, Francisco de las Casas, received a small amount of silkworm eggs from her husband's cousin, Hernando Cortés.[45] At Yanhuitlán, the first eggs produced enough worms to yield about a pound of eggs which were then distributed to surrounding communities. Through the care and attention of María de Aguilar raising enough worms from the first gift of eggs to ensure reproduction, Yanhuitlán became a great centre of sericulture where both Indians and Spaniards were taught the art of silk culture and procured silkworm eggs. Within ten years sericulture had spread throughout the Mixteca Alta and had established itself so effectively that by about 1540 the region was renowned throughout all New Spain for the quality and quantity of its silk.[46]

An influential force in spreading the art of raising silk were the Dominican friars who instructed the Indians in the rudiments of sericulture while converting them to Christianity. In this respect the work of Fray Domingo de Santa María and Fray Francisco Marín, who were also instrumental in the commercialisation of cochineal production, was of great significance. Under their supervision, the Indians of Yanhuitlán were encouraged to plant mulberry trees on community land, and to devote themselves to the raising of silk as a source of money for the community treasury.[47] The industry and effort of Marín and his colleague, based at Yanhuitlán, was largely responsible for the tremendous success of the silk venture in this community. Just how important sericulture was in Yanhuitlán is reflected in the achievement of its second encomendero, Gonzalo de las Casas, being the first Spaniard to write a lengthy manual dealing with the basic skills involved in the raising of silk.[48]

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[45] W. Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico*, Ibero-Americana: 20, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943), p. 25.

[46] Borah, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

[47] Ricard, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-148.

From its cradle in Yanhuitlán sericulture spread to the communities of Achiutla, where the Indians produced "great harvests of such soft, smooth, and shiny silk which none other in the world could excel",[49] Coixtlahuaca, Chachoapan, Etlatongo, Jaltepec, Malinaltepec, Mitlatongo, Nochixtlán, Sosola, Tamazulapan, Tejupan, Teozacoalco, Teposcolula, Tilantongo, Tiltepec and Tlaxiaco. (Figure 5) By about 1580 silk raising was a major cash producing venture for the communities of the Mixteca Alta, with Mixtec silk being held in high repute not only in the towns of New Spain but also in the great cloth centres of Europe.[50] The significance of sericulture in the region was recorded by Fray Toribio Motolinía in his travels through New Spain:

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[48] The full title of las Casas' treatise on sericulture is as follows:

A BOOK ENTITLED THE ART OF RAISING SILK,
FROM THE CHRYSALIS STAGE TILL THE BIRTH OF THE NEW WORM,
WRITTEN BY GONZALO DE LAS CASAS,
GENTLEMAN OF THE PROVINCE AND PEOPLE OF YANHUITLAN,
WHICH IS SITUATED IN THE MIXTECA OF NEW SPAIN,
IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE CITY OF MEXICO ...
PRINTED IN GRANADA IN THE HOUSE OF RENE RABUT,
PRINTER OF BOOKS, IN THE YEAR OF 1581.

Translated from the Spanish title in Borah, op. cit., p. 51.

[49] Fray Francisco de Burgoa, Geográfica Descripcion, Two Volumes, (Mexico, 1934), Vol. I, p. 321. Burgoa was one of the principal chroniclers of the Dominican Order in Oaxaca and wrote this account around 1670. With so much information at his disposal, it is unfortunate that Burgoa chose to write lengthy pedantic discourses in praise of his colleagues rather than actually recording more explicitly their accomplishments in Oaxaca.

[50] Borah, op. cit., p. 31.

> In this land of Mixteca there are ... many excellent mulberry trees. It was for this reason that they first began the culture of silk here, and, although it is only a short time since the business was started in New Spain, they say that there will be a harvest this year of more than fifteen thousand pounds of silk. It is very good silk, and the experts who handle it say that the *tonotzi*[51] is better than the *joyante*[52] of Granada, and the *joyante* of New Spain is an extremely good silk ... it is worth noting that silk can be raised all the year round, without missing a month. Before I wrote this letter, in the present year of 1541, I spent more than thirty days in this region I speak of, and in the month of February I saw silk-seed in many places, some of it about to hatch. I also saw worms in all stages, the little black ones, white ones, worms which had moulted, some once, some twice, and some three and four times, big worms, already out of the baskets and on the trays, some spinning and some in the cocoon, and some moths laying eggs. Three things are to be noted in what I have said: first, that the seed can be hatched without placing it next to the body, or between coverings, as is done in Spain; second, that in no season do the worms die, either from cold or from heat, and third, that there are green leaves on the mulberries all the year round because of the temperate climate of the land. All this I venture to affirm because I have seen it myself, and I maintain that they will be able to raise two large crops of silk a year, and a little all the time, as I have said.[53]

Sericulture was both an Indian and Spanish occupation. At least some amount of Indian community land was given over to silk raising, with the money derived from the sale of silk being used to finance such community projects as maintaining the church, organising a *fiesta* or paying the clergy's wages.[54] From the Spanish point of view, *encomenderos* were quick to realise the tremendous profits to be gained from silk culture, and set the Indians entrusted to their care to work in mulberry plantations and silk houses.[55] It was with respect to silk raising that many abuses of the privileges of encomienda occurred, with encomenderos forcing their Indian charges to work long hours in mulberry plantations in blatant disregard of stipulated labour schedules and royal decrees.[56]

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[51] *Tonotzi* is the Nahuatl name for silk. See Motolinía, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[52] *Joyante* is a smooth, lustrous silk made in Granada. See Motolinía, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[53] Motolinía, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31; Motolinía was an enthusiastic advocate of silk culture in New Spain. This is reflected in the precision and detail of his account, characteristics sadly lacking in the works of other sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish chroniclers such as Burgoa.

[54] Borah, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The most prosperous years of the silk venture were from the 1530s until the 1580s, production rapidly falling off after about 1585. Two principal factors were instrumental in its decline. Firstly, the drastic fall in the size of the Indian population in the course of the sixteenth century, especially after the great epidemics which swept New Spain from 1545 to 1550 and 1575 to 1585, seriously reduced the work force upon which profitable sericulture was based; the labour-intensive enterprise was simply starved of its native workers. Secondly, towards the end of the century, Mixtec silk was forced to compete with Chinese silk brought to New Spain from the Philippines; although the former was of superior quality, it could not compete with the low price of the latter on the open market as Chinese silk was not subjected to high production costs owing to a diminishing labour force.[57] By the turn of the century, the silk bubble had burst, and with it ended an era of economic prosperity that the Mixteca Alta was never again to experience.

Spanish colonial rule was thus largely responsible for instigating major changes in the cultural landscape and the agricultural economy of the Mixteca Alta during the sixteenth century. In the course of the first eighty years of Hispanic involvement in the region, Mixtec communities experienced a new system of organising and exploiting land and labour resources, were introduced to new crops, new livestock, and new methods of production, and were grouped in new planned forms of settlement. Moreover, the Indian, traditionally a subsistence cultivator, was exposed to pastoralism and the concept of raising crops, such as wheat, cochineal, or silk, for cash. Further modifications to the cultural landscape and indigenous patterns of life were brought about by another powerful acculturating force - the Catholic Church.

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[55] Borah, op. cit., p. 45.

[56] Borah, op. cit., p. 42

[57] Borah, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

The Ecclesiastical Imprint of Spanish Colonial Rule

The Spanish Conquest of America was a spiritual as well as military and material campaign and to this end the Catholic Church was devoutly committed. A tremendous amount of authority and influence with respect to decision-making and the outlining of policies lay in the hands of the clergy, a power which the church was by no means reluctant to exercise.

The evangelization of New Spain was undertaken principally by the three Mendicant Orders, the Franciscan, the Dominican, and the Augustinian, under whose guidance and supervision towns were established, churches erected, communities governed and Indians educated in the Word of God. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction of much of southern New Spain was granted to the Dominican Order, whose members had first come to the colony in 1526 and who, by the mid-sixteenth century, were the second largest missionary group operating in New Spain, outnumbered only by the Franciscans.[58] Evangelization of the Mixteca Alta thus fell to the Dominicans, whose first missionaries, Fray Gonzalo Lucerno and Fray Bernardino de Minaya, entered the region in 1529.[59] In the same year Fray Bernardino established a small mission at Yanhuitlán, and in his first year of service there baptised numerous native rulers.[60] The mission was abandoned in 1530 and was not re-established until 1535, by which time New Spain had a more stable government. Just as sericulture spread outwards from its hearth in Yanhuitlán to neighbouring communities, Christianity diffused from the re-established mission at Yanhuitlán westwards to Teposcolula, Tlaxiaco, and Achuitla between 1541 and 1548, northwards to Coixtlahuaca around 1550, and northwestwards to Tamazulapan around 1558.[61]

In the course of the sixteenth century the Dominicans undertook the construction of numerous churches and monasteries in the Mixteca Alta, four of which, at Yanhuitlán, Coixtlahuaca, Teposcolula and Tlaxiaco, have been classified by George Kubler as outstanding architectural achievements.[62] The establishment of these four magnificent religious edifices demanded a combination of skill, imagination, coordination and no small amount of physical effort, and their presence is itself testimony to the finances and resources, both human and physical, which the Dominicans had at their disposal. The communities of Yanhuitlán , Coixtlahuaca, Teposcolula and Tlaxiaco are to this day visually dominated by the churches constructed during the sixteenth century; the ecclesiastical foundations of these four communities, which represent conspicuous components of the rich Spanish heritage of the Mixteca Alta, will now be discussed in some detail.

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[58] Gerhard, op. cit., pp. 17-22, and Ricard, op. cit., p. 77.

[59] Ricard, op. cit., p. 71.

[60] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 86.

[61] Ricard, op. cit., p. 71.

[62] George Kubler, Mexican Architecture in the Sixteenth Century, Two Volumes, (New Haven, 1948), Vol. I, pp. 24-26. Yanhuitlán, Coixtlahuaca, and Tlaxiaco are grouped as monuments of the first class which have "the largest churches, with vaults or richly decorated wooden ceilings; elaborate conventual lay-outs in two stories with one or two courts and vaulted walks; rich and abundant ornament." Teposcolula is grouped by Kubler among monuments of the second class which have "medium-sized, well-built churches of permanent construction; two-storied conventual buildings with or without vaulting; may include large establishments of which construction extended over several generations".

Yanhuitlán

Work on the massive church and friary at Yanhuitlán (Plates 8 and 9) was begun around 1550 and lasted until about 1580.[63] The church is situated on an elevated platform to the west of the town *zócalo* and rests upon a small pre-Hispanic structure, a site frequently chosen by the clergy when establishing a foundation.[64] Persons involved in the construction of the church were the Portuguese master craftsman Antonio Barboso, the great religious artist Andrés de Concha, and an unknown Italian architect. The last-mentioned was commissioned by the second *encomendero* of Yanhuitlán, Gonzalo de las Casas, following

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[63] Kubler, *op*. *cit*., Vol. I, p. 63.

[64] The best examples of this policy of location are at Mitla in the Valley of Oaxaca, where the church is sited on and adjacent to elaborate pre-Hispanic structures, and at Cholula, Puebla, where the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Remédios is built on top of the Great Pyramid. Evidence of pre-Hispanic occupation on the site which the church at Yanhuitlán now occupies is present in the form of Post-Classic Mixtec polychrome pottery sherds, which can be found around the church atrium even on superficial inspection.

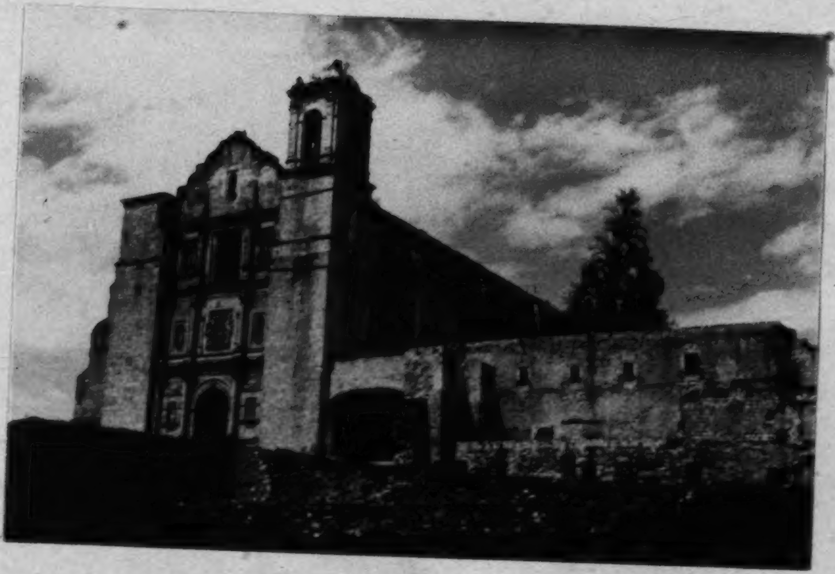

Plate 8 Church and friary at Yanhuitlán.

Plate 9 The north side of the church at Yanhuitlán, supported by flying buttresses.

severe criticism of the enterprise by Viceroy Mendoza, who complained that the Dominicans were undertaking the construction of the church without proper technical supervision.[65] In order to hasten completion of the church, the Dominicans were granted a cuatequil, or short term labour draft, of six thousand Indians during the 1570s; this work force was divided into ten shifts of six hundred each, and charged with the transportation of stone, water, and lime.[66] Such a commitment in a community of around 12,000 inhabitants[67] placed a heavy burden on the resources of Yanhuitlán and provoked further criticism of the Dominicans, the complaint in this instance being lodged by a Spanish resident of Yanhuitlán, Alonso Caballero, who accused the Order of economic exploitation of the Indians.[68] Having to contend with such a stringent labour requirement, there can be little doubt that other important tasks, such as the maintenance of upper-slope terrace systems to hold back soil erosion, were sadly neglected.

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[65] Kubler, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 535. Mendoza's criticism appears to have been quite valid, for the major amendment carried out under the Italian's supervision was the erection of two huge flying buttresses on the north side of the church to strengthen cracked and subsiding walls. (See Plate 9.) See also Burgoa, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 295.

[66] Burgoa, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 291-292.

[67] This meant that about half the entire community was involved in the construction of the church.

[68] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 87. Specifically, Caballero claimed "that the Dominicans were forcing the Indians to work long hours in the stone quarries for little or no pay, assessing fines for missing Mass or fiestas, carrying on monopolies in certain commodities, charging excessive prices for goods and services, and conspiring with the caciques to exploit the Indians". (Spores, p. 87).

Coixtlahuaca

The majestic Dominican foundation at Coixtlahuaca (Plate 10) was established between 1570 and 1580, a frieze above the doorway of the main entrance to the church bearing the date 1576. Like the earlier foundation at Yanhuitlán, the church at Coixtlahuaca lies on a raised platform, and is situated across a broad and arid valley from an important pre-Hispanic complex. (Plate 11.) One of the most interesting architectural features of the church is the spacious open chapel, a unique invention by the Spanish clergy in the New World. (Plate 12.) The open chapel was designed for use when the entire community was in attendance and could not be accommodated within the church. In this event, Mass would be celebrated by the priest from the open chapel with the Indians congregated in the atrium of the church where they could follow the ceremony without difficulty.[69]

Teposcolula

Fray Domingo de Santa María first established a mission for the Dominican Order at Teposcolula in 1541, following the temporary withdrawal of the Order from Yanhuitlán due to lack of co-operation from the encomendero Francisco de las Casas.[70] The site of the first foundation was abandoned some time after 1550 and work was begun in a new location on the well-drained slopes of a hill lying to the east of the town.[71] Like Yanhuitlán, the Dominican enterprise at Teposcolula

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[69] Ricard, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

[70] Spores, Mixtec Kings, op. cit., p. 87.

[71] Kubler, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 533.

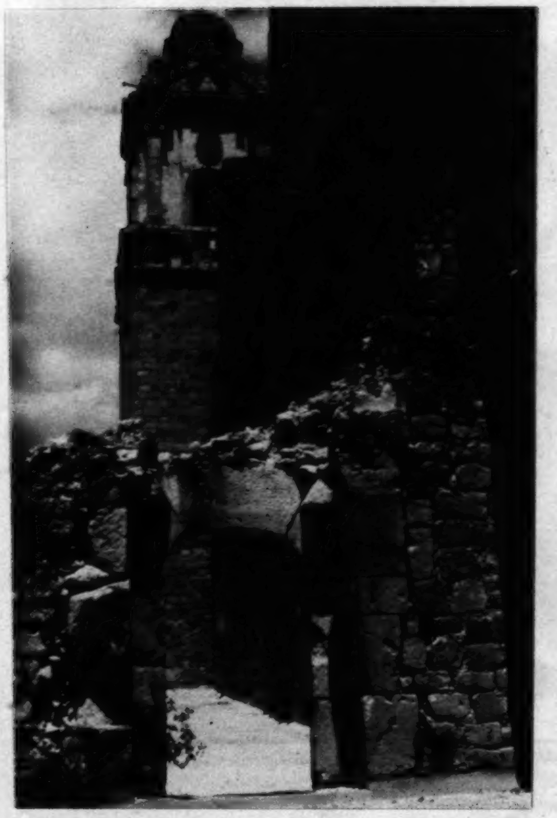

Plate 10 The Dominican foundation at Coixtlahuaca.

Plate 11 Church and settlement of Coixtlahuaca, looking northwards across the valley from the pre-Hispanic complex.

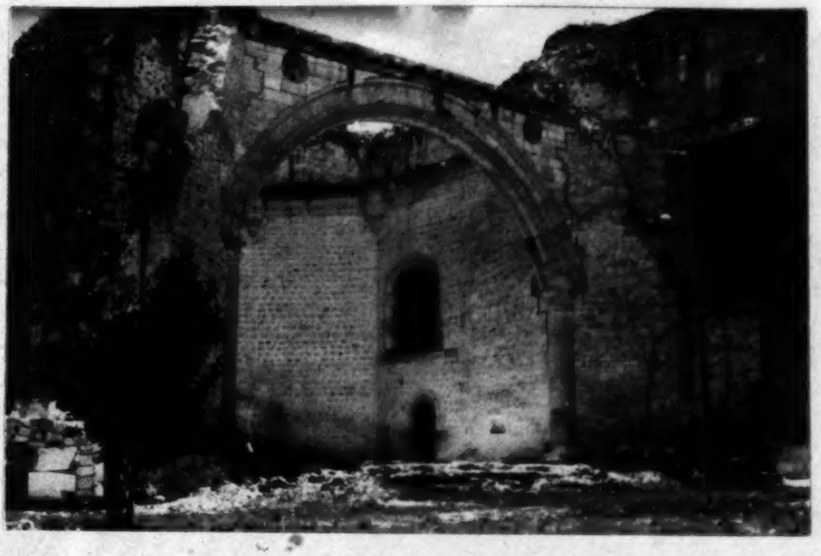

Plate 12 The open chapel at Coixtlahuaca.

was criticised by Viceroy Mendoza for being too ambitious and being undertaken without expert architectural supervision.[72] The church is at present undergoing modest restoration and has a beautiful open chapel (Plate 13), in slightly better condition than the one at Coixtlahuaca.[73]

Tlaxiaco

The evangelization of Tlaxiaco was administered by Fray Gonzalo Lucerno, who entered the community in 1548 and supervised the construction of a church modelled on the earlier Dominican establishment at Yanhuitlán.[74] Work continued on the church for about ten years, and was still being carried out at the time of Fray Lucerno's death in 1558.[75] The friar thus never had the satisfaction of seeing his more conservative scheme completed (Plate 14), and was laid to rest at the right of the main altar.[76]

The building activities of the Dominican Order, with some of the more elaborate projects taking ten to twenty years to complete, taxed both the labour force and the natural resources of all the communities evangelized by the Dominicans in the Mixteca Alta. This religious drive left a conspicuous and frequently incongruous imprint on the cultural landscape, with even the most insignificant, most remote

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[72] Kubler, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 533.

[73] Both these churches sustained damage by the earthquake which shook Northern Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz states on August 28th, 1973. The ceiling of the open chapel at Coixtlahuaca collapsed as a result of these tremors.

[74] Burgoa, op. cit., Vol I, pp. 305-310.

[75] Kubler, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 534.

[76] Kubler, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 534.

Plate 13 Church and open chapel at Teposcolula.

Plate 14 Tlaxiaco, with the Dominican foundation of Asuncíon de Nuestra Señora dominating the townscape.

rural community supporting a church of often substantial proportions. The clergy played a further role in the modification of the cultural landscape by its intimate involvement in teaching the Indians the art of silk raising and in commercializing and increasing cochineal production by improving the irrigation system of the region, ventures already discussed. In addition, the Dominicans were influential promoters of livestock raising, the inimitable Fray Domingo de Santa María being responsible for the establishment of numerous sheep and cattle estancias throughout the Mixteca.[77] Lastly, the Church was an influential force in the establishment and organisation of hospitals, a commitment of crucial significance in view of the catastrophic decline of the Indian population through epidemics and disease.

Demographic Change

The most critical event in New Spain during the sixteenth century was the drastic fall in the size of the native population. There is little contention among demographers that the Indian population declined in number; there is, however, much controversy over the extent of the decline. The most lengthy and detailed research into the demographic patterns of colonial Mexico have been conducted by S. F. Cook, L. B. Simpson, and W. Borah, who hold that New Spain in 1519 supported a population of around twenty-two millions which, by 1620, had fallen to less than one million.[78] For the Mixteca Alta (Graph 4), Cook

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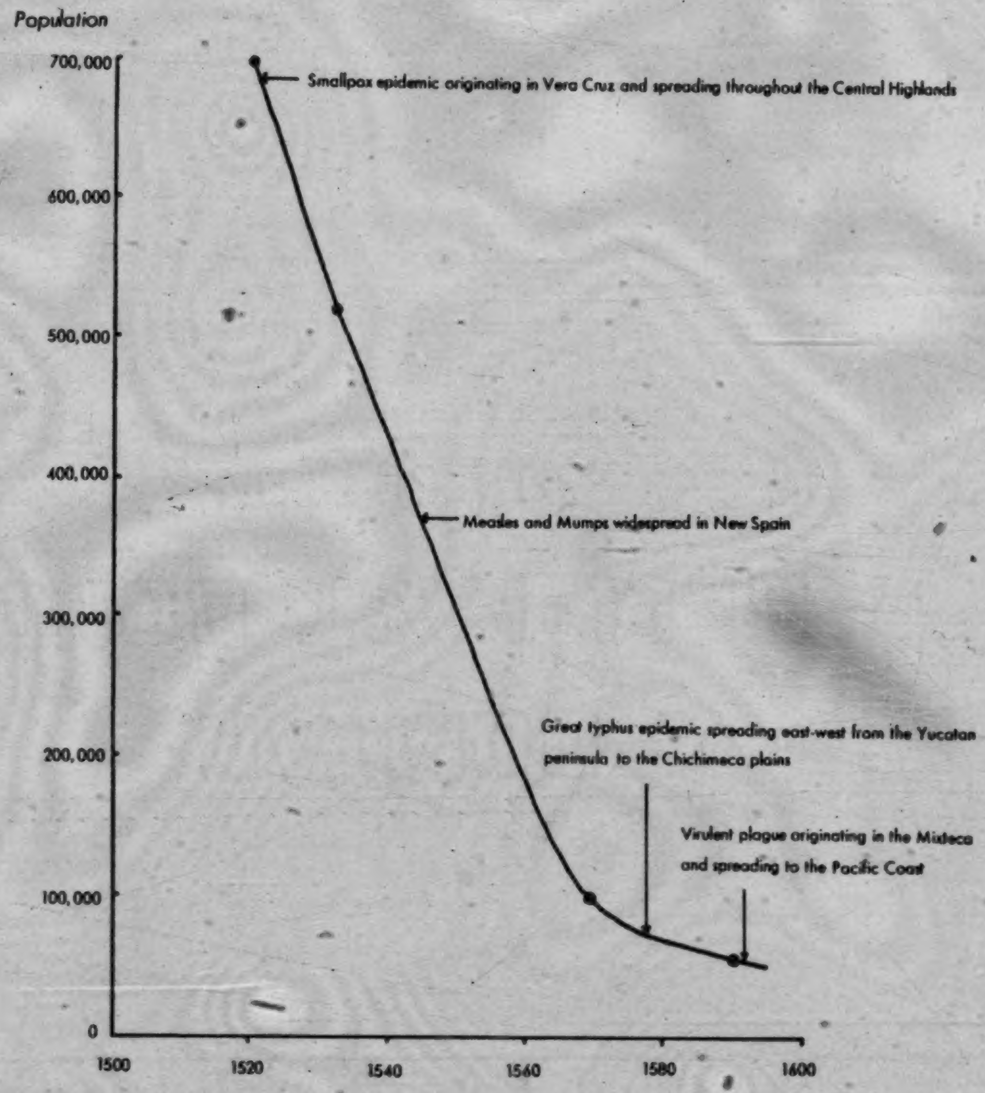
[77] Ricard, op. cit., p. 143.

[78] A brief but thorough review of the population controversy in sixteenth century New Spain appears in Gerhard, op. cit., pp. 22-28.

Population Decline in the Mixteca Alta During the Sixteenth Century



Smallpox epidemic originating in Vera Cruz and spreading throughout the Central Highlands

Measles and Mumps widespread in New Spain

Great typhus epidemic spreading east-west from the Yucatan peninsula to the Chichimeca plains

Virulent plague originating in the Mixteca and spreading to the Pacific Coast

Graph 4

Source - S. F. Cook and W. Borah, *The Population of the Mixteca Alta [1520-1960]*, *Ibero-Americana No 50*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1968, and P. Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972. The curve is based on four sixteenth century population estimates, 1520, 1532, 1569, and 1590, computed by Cook and Borah from Spanish fiscal and ecclesiastical records.

and Borah estimate that the region supported 700,000 people in 1520 and that this number had diminished to 57,000 by 1590.[79]

Numerous explanations have been put forward to account for the decline of the native population, but the principal cause of death was due to Indian communities being exposed to Old World diseases, to which they had no natural immunity.[80] The three most virulent killers were smallpox, measles, and typhus, with typhoid, influenza, mumps, and malaria also taking heavy tolls. Even before the fall of Tenochtitlán, in August, 1521, an epidemic of smallpox had swept through the Central Highlands, killing thousands of Indians in regions still unvisited by the Spaniards. The most severe epidemics, however, occurred from 1545 to 1548, and from 1576 to around 1581, when firstly measles, then typhus ravaged New Spain. These two epidemics inflicted a tremendous loss of life on the Mixteca, which also suffered an outbreak of plague from 1591 to 1592.[81]

The fall of the Indian population had very serious effects on the economy of the Mixteca Alta. Much of the prosperity of the Spanish silk and cochineal ventures was based on the use of Indian labour, either recruited without expense as part of the privileges of holding an *encomienda*, or cheaply hired. A declining population deprived these two commercial enterprises of one of their essential inputs, namely a large, unpaid, or lowly-paid work-force. Lack of labour in conjunction with strong overseas competition brought about the almost total collapse of the silk venture in the Mixteca Alta, while shortages of labour also significantly affected the production of cochineal. A diminishing population was thus, to a large degree, responsible for plunging the Mixteca Alta, towards the end of the sixteenth century, into an economic eclipse from which it has still to emerge.

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[79] S. F. Cook and W. Borah, *The Population of the Mixteca Alta (1520 - 1960)*, Ibero-Americana: 50, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 32. This represents an absolute decline of 643,000, or 92%, over the first seventy years of Spanish colonial rule.

[80] Gerhard, *op*. *cit*., p. 23.

[81] Gerhard, *op*. *cit*., p. 23.

Besides economic repercussions, a decreasing Indian population also contributed to the exacerbation of soil erosion in the region. The decline in native population was accompanied by the abandonment of cultivable land, much of which was terraced hill-slopes.[82] Once deserted, the terrace systems of the hill slopes were not maintained, and soon fell into disrepair. Natural, down-slope soil erosion took place during the rainy season, remained unchecked from year to year, and resulted in the irrevocable loss of much cultivable land. This chronic syndrome of erosion since the end of the sixteenth century has been responsible for the removal, in certain communities of the Mixteca Alta, of up to one-third of the land formerly under cultivation, and continues to plague the impoverished Mixtec people to this day.

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[82] Ancient terraces formerly under cultivation can still be seen today on less drastically eroded upper slopes.

CHAPTER FOUR

EPILOGUE

All time is unredeemable.

T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

According to the Mexican census of 1960, the Mixteca Alta supported a population of approximately 261,000, a figure which reflected an increase of almost 100% over the population of the region in 1882.[1] Since the end of the violent and disruptive revolutionary period between 1910 and 1921, population in the Mixteca Alta has been steadily increasing, but at a significantly smaller rate of increase than the national average. Much of this slower rate of increase has been due to heavy emigration from the region to other parts of Mexico, particularly to Oaxaca, Puebla, and Mexico City. The principal reason for migration is the failure of the land to support a rising population at an acceptable level of prosperity. Motives behind migration are thus largely economic, and reflect the desire of the emigrant to lead a more secure life, without having to worry about the shortage of land, the poverty of soil, or the high risks of crop failure which characterise the communities of the Mixteca

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[1] S. F. Cook and W. Borah, The Population of the Mixteca Alta: 1520 - 1960, Ibero-Americana: 50, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 62 and 87, estimate the population of the Mixteca Alta in 1882 to have been around 140,000.

Alta. These were the main considerations of migrants from Tilantongo, a remote community situated in the heart of the Mixteca Alta, who were interviewed by Douglas Butterworth after resettling in Mexico City; in the eyes of the migrants, to have remained in their community of birth would have meant resignation to a hard, brutal and impoverished life.[2]

The Mixteca Alta, therefore, cannot absorb the natural increase of its population, yet it is probable that the same region around 450 years ago supported about three times its present numbers. This inability to maintain in the present day a density of population such as prevailed during the early part of the sixteenth century is because much formerly cultivable land has been removed from exploitation due to prolonged processes of soil erosion. Natural and human-induced soil erosion were characteristic of the late pre-Hispanic period in the Mixteca Alta, but events occured under Spanish rule during the sixteenth century which precipitated a serious acceleration of soil-removal processes. These events are summarised below.

I. The decline in the size of the Indian population through contact with virulent Old World diseases. This resulted in the abandonment of land on hill-slopes, the non-maintenance of man-made terraces to hold back down-slope activity, and an associated increase in the amount of soil washed off during the rainy season.

II. Spanish exploitation of Indian labour in silk raising, cochineal production, and church construction. By channeling an ever-diminishing native work force into such labour-intensive enterprises, the upkeep of hill-slope terrace systems was further neglected.

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[2] D. S. Butterworth, "A Study of the Urbanization Process Among Mixtec Migrants from Tilantongo in Mexico City," America Indígena, Vol. 22, (1962), pp. 257-274.

III. The introduction of livestock, particularly sheep and goats, into the agricultural economy. Unregulated pasturing of sheep and goats on abandoned land resulted in overgrazing which, in an arid region of sudden summer rainfall, greatly stimulated erosional processes.

IV. The use of the wooden plough, introduced from the provinces of Andalusia and Extremadura in Southern Spain, on lower slopes. Continual ploughing was responsible for the breaking and loosening of topsoil which led to the displacement of fine particles of fertile soil during the period of summer runoff. Moreover, employment of the plough in areas of tepetate subsoil brought to the surface unweathered fragments of the alkali-impregnated hardpan, with detrimental effects on soil fertility.

Processes of soil denudation have continued more or less unresisted in the Mixteca Alta from the sixteenth century until the present day, severely curtailing the capacity of the region to support a now rapidly expanding population. The problem of land shortage with which the Mixteca Alta is now confronted, therefore, is rooted in events which took place during the sixteenth century. It is for this reason that an analysis of this period of time is essential to an understanding of the major socio-economic characteristics of the region in the present day.

During the first two decades of the sixteenth century the communities of the Mixteca Alta, grouped together to form a number of small kingdoms, were part of the great empire of the Culhua Mexica. For purposes of tributary administration, the Mexica divided the

Mixteca Alta into two provinces, one centred on Tlaxiaco and the other centred on Coixtlahuaca. Both these provinces, especially the latter, were rich, resourceful, and densely populated areas, and were required to send annual shipments of certain commodities, including gold dust, cochineal, and quetzal feathers, to the Mexica capital at Tenochtitlán. Although under the tributary jurisdiction of Tenochtitlán, the Mixtec kingdoms were politically autonomous and were governed by local royal lineages. The Mexica, primarily concerned with the extraction of tribute from subjugated territories, administered the exploitation of the economic resources of the Mixteca Alta in such a way as to preserve long-established systems of production and maintain traditional cultural patterns. Life in the Mixteca Alta under the tributary yoke of the Mexica of Tenochtitlán thus in no fundamental way differed from the life led under the hegemony of Mixtec ruling families.

This was not the experience of the Mixtec people under Spanish colonial rule. Like the Mexica, the Spaniards' principal motives for the conquest of the Mixteca Alta, as with most other parts of the New World, were economic. Spanish intervention and involvement in the región, however, subjected the Mixtec people to a radically different cultural ideology which significantly affected their pattern of life. The main components of Spanish colonial ideology which introduced change in Mixtec communities were the imposition of the encomienda system, the reorganisation of settlement morphology, the conversion of the Indians to Christianity in conjunction with the foundation of often elaborate community churches, and the reshaping of agriculture. Associated with the last-mentioned was the introduction of new crops and new breeds of livestock, which greatly altered the nature of the native agricultural economy. Of particular commercial importance was silk raising, which was responsible for much of the economic prosperity of the Mixteca Alta between about 1530 and 1580. After 1580, the prosperity that the region had enjoyed during the preceeding fifty years disappeared, due chiefly to the collapse of the silk venture through foreign competition and the decline of its essential Indian labour force through the contraction of Old World diseases to which the native population was now exposed. Since the end of the sixteenth century the communities of the Mixteca Alta have existed in a condition of social and economic ill-being from which they seem, at present, incapable of emerging.

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